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But this is not to say that the resources available locally are negligible. This book has benefited from being written in a department headed by Geoffrey Bolton, and it has gained from the fresh enthusiasm and intelligence with which, year by year, Australian students approach the middle ages. It owes more than he can realise to Tom Poole, my collaborator in a course of which Justinian forms a part. This book is a small return for so much kindness and friendship.

John Moorhead

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EDITOR'S PREFACE

The reign of Justinian is a period of central importance to our understanding of many aspects of the history of Europe, the Middle East and Asia. Its history is one of power exercised across a vast geographical range and against a background of a world into which new peoples and new interests were constantly intruding, and in which the often superficial unities and certainties which had existed under the Roman Empire were steadily giving place to local differences and political fragmentation. It must none the less have looked for a time as if Justinian was restoring the grandeur of the classical past, as his armies swept into Italy and North Africa, as Roman law was definitively codified and as magnificent buildings were constructed throughout his lands. The emperor's personality, and that of his remarkable wife Theodora, dominate the middle years of the sixth century. John Moorhead's most welcome addition to the Medieval World Series skilfully does justice to this immense panorama. He charts Justinian's complex doplomacy as he dealt *inter alia* with Persians to the east, Slavs to the north and Vandals and Lombards to the west, as he wrestled with the theological differences between the imperial Church and, on one hand, the Monophysites in Egypt, and, on the other, the emerging and distinctive opinions of the popes and the western Church, and as he grappled with court politics and apparently overbearing generals such as Belisarius.

As a scholar who has already written extensively on the fifth and sixth centuries, John Moorhead brings a wealth of knowledge and experience to this new assessment of Justinian and his reign. While the great histories of Procopius are inevitably central to the discussion, he also ranges over archaeological,

artistic and theological evidence, all of which is currently contributing to a deeper understanding of this difficult period. John Moorhead's Justinian is a restless and energetic man, rather than a visionary. The early years of his reign are typified by a determination to tackle the political, military and religious difficulties which the empire faced, and which he believed it to be his duty to confront. The 520s and 530s were a time when numerous great initiatives were launched. If the results were less decisive than the emperor might have hoped, and even if fresh problems emerged while old ones proved intractable, the agenda remains formidable and important. John Moorhead's final assessment of Justinian is less than eulogistic, but it is notably judicious. If the rhetoric which accompanied many of the emperor's enterprises emphasized the restoration of the past, the reign in fact turned out to be in many respects notable for the increased intellectual and political distance from its classical heritage. Although military achievments were more apparent than real, it was only some time after his death that the submerged antagonisms re-emerged and defences crumbled. The life and achievements of 'an extraordinary man' (the author's verdict) have been authoritatively and stimulatingly assessed against their appropriate contemporary background.

David Bates

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INTRODUCTION

The reign of the Byzantine emperor Justinian (527–565) was pivotal in late antiquity. From his headquarters in Constantinople he accomplished great deeds in the most diverse fields: major legal reforms were successfully carried out, vast numbers of architecturally distinguished buildings were erected, wars were launched and won against established powers in Africa and Italy, substantial innovations were made to the administration of the empire, and the position of the Christian religion and that of non-Christians in the empire were both changed considerably. There were other important events which the emperor did not initiate but to which he had to respond, such as the outbreak of a disastrous plague and depressing developments in foreign affairs. There can be no doubt that the activities of Justinian, which exhibit characteristics which can be readily labelled 'classical' side by side with others which seem 'medieval', marked an important stage in the move from the world of antiquity to that of the middle ages in the lands around the eastern half of the Mediterranean and beyond.

The historian of the period is fortunate, for it is extraordinarily well documented. Some of the wars for which Justinian was responsible are described in the work of one of the greatest of the Greek historians. Procopius was born in the Palestinian town of Caesarea, and became a legal adviser to the general Belisarius when he was based on the Persian front. Thereafter he accompanied him on expeditions to Africa and Italy, so when he began to write a history of Justinian's wars covering the period until 553 he was able to give an eyewitness account of much of the action until the time when, in the early 540s, he seems to have settled in Constantinople. Procopius was one

of those historians in the happy position of having found what he considered a major topic and being able to write a big book about it. The words with which his history opens, 'Procopius of Caesarea has written the history of the wars', constitute a direct borrowing of the words which Thucydides had used almost a thousand years earlier at the beginning of his history of the Peloponnesian war; when he went on to mention his wish that important events would not be 'obliterated' he was using a verb which Herodotus, writing before Thucydides, had employed early in his history of the Persian wars. But Procopius went beyond implicit assertions that he wished to be seen in the same company as the great historians of Athens in its golden age. Whereas Herodotus had set himself to recount 'great and marvellous deeds', Procopius was going to tell of 'immensely great deeds'; if Thucydides had told of a war 'great and noteworthy above all the wars which had gone before', Procopius' books were about 'the greatest and noteworthy deeds'. So it was that he felt able to boast, his eyes firmly fixed on his eminent predecessors, that the deeds carried out in the wars which formed the subject matter of his account were the most important and greatest in history. Here was an extremely positive way in which some of the achievements of Justinian could be evaluated.

His account of the wars was not, however, the only work which Procopius wrote. In his *Buildings*, apparently written between 553 and 555, he set himself to describe the buildings erected by Justinian in many parts of the empire. This book is extremely favourable to the emperor, whom it represents as instructing the most gifted architects how to overcome difficulties which had defeated them. But in another work which was written during the year 550, the notorious *Secret History* (Greek *Anecdota*), Procopius had already penned a portrait of Justinian and his wife Theodora which was bitterly hostile. His trenchant criticism of the royal pair, in some ways anticipated in the *Wars* but given far stronger expression here, and the scandalous manner in which this was conveyed, made the work dynamite. Procopius can have intended to publish it only after the death of Justinian, for although it was written fifteen years before this occurred Procopius expressed himself in a way which suggests that the emperor had already died, and its first reader known to us lived over four hundred years later. What seems to be a radical difference in tone between this and the

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other works of Procopius led some scholars of earlier generations to deny his authorship of the *Secret History*, but such a difference may be more apparent than real, for modern work has made it clear that his various works are more closely connected than has often been thought.[1] As we shall see, the data provided by Procopius in his various books are sometimes contradictory, but it will be best to consider individual cases as they arise.

Other narrative sources complement the work of Procopius. Agathias, a native of the town of Myrina in Asia, was a poet and lawyer who practised in Constantinople. After the death of Justinian he began working on a history of the wars the emperor undertook from the point at which Procopius had laid down his pen, but he only reached 558. He was followed in turn by Menander the guardsman, who, during the reign of the emperor Maurice, wrote a work of which only fragments incorporated in a text of the tenth century survive. A very different kind of historical writing is the chronicle of John Malalas, a rhetor from Antioch who moved to Constantinople in the 530s. The last book of his chronicle, a comprehensive work which begins with Adam, is devoted to the reign of Justinian. Unlike Procopius and Agathias, John Malalas had no pretensions to a fine style, but that his Greek was of a popular kind far removed from that of the classical period does not mean that he is a poor source of information. For the early part of Justinian's reign Malalas was closely followed by the author of the Paschal Chronicle, a text written in Constantinople early in the seventh century which adds further information.

All these texts are in Greek, but two important chronicles in Latin preserve data not known from other sources. Marcellinus comes, an Illyrian who served Justinian in Constantinople before he became emperor, wrote a chronicle extending to the year 518, which was later extended by Marcellinus himself to 534 and then by another author to 548, while the chronicle by Victor of Tunnunna, an African bishop who suffered from Justinian's church policy, goes as far as 563. Easterners to write on church matters included Evagrius, a layman living in Antioch whose Ecclesiastical History continued a genre two centuries old by the time of Justinian, and John of Ephesos, who also wrote a fascinating book on the lives of eastern holy men.

1. Averil Cameron *Procopius and the Sixth Century* London 1985 is outstandingly the best work on the subject.

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Interesting traditions are also preserved in some texts from later periods; among these the most important is a work by Theophanes, a monk who wrote in Constantinople early in the ninth century and had access to material now lost.

We have, then, an extraordinary richness of narrative evidence. But, as is so often the case, the sources have a great potential to mislead. That different works by Procopius provide contradictory data is obviously awkward. More subtly, that some of Justinian's wars are recounted at great length by a major historian has often caused modern scholars to assign them an importance in his reign greater than that which they really had.[2] Further, certain kinds of bias may be built into our sources. While some of the texts emanate from Asia, one notices immediately how much of our information is provided by authors writing in Constantinople. Egypt, in particular, is poorly represented in these sources, which overwhelmingly speak with a metropolitan accent. In terms of the ability of these texts to document the deeds of Justinian this may be all to the good, for the emperor rarely stirred beyond the walls of his capital. Yet oddly enough, those who wrote them were not natives of Constantinople. One can only be struck by how much of our knowledge of the reign of Justinian is provided by authors of provincial backgrounds who had come to the capital, done well for themselves, and were then understandably prepared to look with kindly eyes on the regime from which they had profited. Further, Justinian was not averse to orchestrating a positive image of his reign. Procopius's *Buildings*, which, if not commissioned by him (cf. 1.3.1), may well have been undertaken in an attempt to win his favour, goes out of its way to interpret his activities positively; a scholarly civil servant, John the Lydian, represents Justinian as having suggested to him that he write the history of his war against the Persians (*Powers* 3.28); and the chronicle of John Malalas may contain propagandistic material put into circulation by the government.[3] Hence the plethora of sources is a mixed blessing. In the sixth century, as much as in other times, the

2. For example, over a third of the space devoted to Justinian in the second volume of J.B. Bury *History of the Later Roman Empire* 2 London 1923 is taken up with narratives of the reconquest of Africa and Italy.
3. As argued by Roger Scott 'Malalas, *The Secret History* and Justinian's propaganda' *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 39 1985 pp. 99–109.

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intelligent exercise of patronage by a powerful figure could easily lead to that person's disappearing from the sight of later generations behind a veil of benevolent primary sources.

These texts are supplemented by the voluminous non-narrative sources for the period. Justinian presided over a great enterprise of codifying Roman law, so that the shape given the law by the commissioners he appointed to revise it is perfectly known. But at least as important for the historian are the novels, or new laws, which he issued piecemeal in response to matters as they arose. These provide exceptional insight into the social life of the empire, and the way in which they are framed allows us to see how the government sought to present itself to the people, although here again it is the official line which is heard. The affairs of the church generated a large bulk of material, among which that concerned with an ecumenical council held at Constantinople in 553 is particularly extensive. It must be said that much of this is of purely doctrinal interest, but some of it has the merit of originating in circles hostile to Justinian, and so allows critical voices to be heard. The *Collectio avellana*, a collection of correspondence between the papacy and various dignitaries which was preserved in Rome, contains a large volume of material bearing on ecclesiastical relations between East and West in the time of Justinian.

The activities of this emperor and the times in which he lived are therefore illuminated by written sources of a prodigality for which historians of the century which was to follow would be grateful. Beyond this we have the rare luxury of a small number of texts which Justinian himself may be presumed to have written. Apart from a hymn in Greek of which he may have been the author[4] and some theological works, as we shall see it is highly likely that some letters in Latin written to pope Hormisdas in his name which are preserved in the *Collectio avellana*, together with a few laws, also in Latin, which were issued in his name, were the work of the emperor himself rather than the officials who customarily wrote such documents on behalf of the emperor. So it is that we have a degree of unmediated access to Justinian which provides direct evidence for his concerns and the furnishings of his mind.

Apart from these texts, we have a good number of other

4. V. Grumel 'L'Auteur et la date de composition du tropaire 'Ο Μονογενὴς' *Echos d'Orient* 22 1923: 398–418.

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sources of information for Justinian's reign. Many of the buildings for which he was responsible, such as the great cathedral of Hagia Sophia which was erected in Constantinople during the 530s, can still be seen, as can the beautiful mosaics with their pictures of Justinian and Theodora which were installed in the church of S Vitale at Ravenna late in the following decade. Increasingly, the work of archeologists is uncovering the remains of buildings, streets and indeed whole towns of the sixth century, to the extent that it is now impossible for historians to avoid considering evidence of this kind, however difficult it may be to integrate it into the narrative treatments which written sources most naturally generate. Evidence provided by archaeology is making us better informed as to the changing conditions of rural and urban life, and so allowing broad social and economic contexts to be understood far more clearly than they have been in the past. It seems safe to predict that future excavations will further modify our interpretations of the period.

But the discovery of new evidence is not the only way in which our understanding of the past develops. Each generation of historians approaches the same sources looking for different things. The feminist movement, for example, has led us to address quite new questions to bodies of evidence which have long been available, and historical understanding is being revised in the light of the answers which have emerged. And beyond this, there is always the task of assessing our evidence and arranging the various bits and pieces into the patterns which seem to do justice to them best. In working through the sources for the reign of Justinian I have been struck by the possibility of disentangling various events which historians have often lumped together. In the discussion of Justinian provided by a standard introduction to Byzantine history we can read that it was the 'sacred mission of the emperor to free Roman lands from the yoke of barbarian invaders and Arian heretics, and to restore the ancient frontiers of a single Roman and orthodox Christian empire. And it was towards this end that the whole of Justinian's policy was directed'.[5] But we may take leave to doubt this generalization. Careful analysis of the constituent parts of his reign may seem

5. George Ostrogorsky *History of the Byzantine State* trans. Joan Hussey Oxford 1968 69. See further below ch. 3 n. 1.

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a grey business, but it suggests that actions which have been interpreted in the light of overarching ideological purposes need not be and probably should not be taken in this way.

It may be worth going into some detail at this point. As we shall see, historians have sometimes thought that Justinian concluded a peace treaty with Persia in 532 so that he would be free to make war on the Vandals in Africa and subsequently the Ostrogoths in Italy. But the adoption of this framework may involve the kind of improper privileging of the role of the western wars in our understanding of Justinian's reign to which, it was suggested above, the great work of Procopius may predispose us, so that other developments are wrongly seen in the light of what is taken to be the central event. If we accept that the peace of 532 was desirable to Persia for its own domestic reasons and to Justinian because his troops had been faring poorly, that the African and Italian wars were launched in the context of circumstances which had recently developed in those lands, and that the happy outcome of the first war, that against the Vandals, was something hoped for rather than expected, the case for seeing the capture of Ravenna in 540 as the motive for which peace with Persia was concluded in 532 looks decidedly weak. To be sure, there are some passages in Justinian's laws which could be used to support an interpretation of the wars as a single operation undertaken to restore the boundaries to their old limits, but they were written at the high point of what then seemed surprisingly effortless success, and it would be risky to use them as evidence for policy when the wars were begun, or indeed were further advanced; still more to conclude that peace with Persia had been concluded towards this end.

Another possible context for Justinian's decision to launch the wars is biographical. Justinian was born in the small Latin-speaking area which remained in the empire by the late fifth century, and so, it could be argued, he would have been more keen than most emperors to regain the Roman territories in the West which had been lost during that century. But this consideration, which would have applied equally to the emperor who preceded him, a man who nevertheless betrayed no sign of thinking in such terms, would entail the survival in a man who had come to Constantinople decades earlier of casts of mind and attitudes brought from the provinces, the very things which life in the cosmopolitan

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capital tended to neutralize. There can be no doubt that in some ways Justinian did remain out of place in the great city: his gauche Latin, the narrow strain of his piety and, most of all, his loyal adherence over the decades to advisers and associates of unimpressive backgrounds who had themselves come from the depths of the provinces is enough to suggest this. Nevertheless, the depth of learning Justinian achieved in the theological literature of the Greek-speaking East indicates his success in transcending his western background. His roots in the West were not enough to make him launch wars there. Neither is there any need to locate his legal reforms against the background of the wars, on the grounds that both betray a concern for Roman universalism,[6] for the great reform of the laws can be seen as looking back to its partial anticipations in the preceding century more naturally than forward to the wars in the West which were undertaken shortly afterwards.

Perhaps, then, it will prove difficult to organize our understanding of Justinian's reign around a few central themes. Perhaps it was characterized more than has sometimes been thought by policy being made on the run, and it will emerge as more disordered than one had thought it to be. Be this as it may, the reign of Justinian provides far more than the spectacle of a busy emperor coping on an *ad hoc* basis with the spectacular challenges which late antiquity threw before him. His initiatives, many of them launched in an extraordinary burst of activity shortly after he came to the throne, were frequently bold, original, and successful, so that he had a greater impact on the history of the world than any other head of state of the period. He largely redrew the political map of the Mediterranean region, but his other achievements were longer lasting. Of no other figure in late antiquity could it be said that his legacy triumphantly survives in legal texts, theological definitions and stones. Justinian confronts the historian with a massive achievement.

Yet it brought trouble in its wake. Paradoxically, among the most intractable of the various problems which came to occupy Justinian's attention as the decades passed were those

6. As does John Meyendorff, affirming that 'Roman universalism . . . led Justinian to military conquest of the Western provinces lost to the barbarians' (*Imperial Unity and Christian Divisions* Crestwood NY 1989 p. 207) and that his legal work 'reflected his dream of a universal and Christian Roman order' (ibid. p. 248).

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of his own creation. As it turned out the wars in the West were ultimately successful in military terms, but they took far longer and required far more resources than would have seemed likely in the first flush of success. Not all of those who lived in the conquered territories were pleased at the manner and results of Justinian's victories, and it may be that his successes were responsible for turning western opinion against him. Another unlooked for response to his early victories was that of the shah of Persia, who retaliated by launching attacks on imperial territory in the East which had to be dealt with. The wars also meant that the military resources of the empire were being spread dangerously thinly at a time when the Balkans were coming under increasing pressure. The flexible Justinian tried to cope with this problem in a number of ways, but one of his solutions, which involved buying the friendship of some unsavoury and greedy allies, was itself to produce further difficulties.

The outcome of his ecclesiastical endeavours was similar to that of the western wars. They may seem to have reached a triumphant climax at the council of Constantinople (553), which is still accepted as an Ecumenical Council by the Orthodox and Roman churches. Yet, seen in the light of the purpose for which it was called, the council was a disaster. Not only did it fail to achieve its purpose of reconciling the warring parties within the church, but by turning members of the majority against each other it sowed disunion where none had existed before. In short, Justinian was the victim of his own successes. And so it was that the energies which early in his reign had been responsible for dramatic initiatives were increasingly devoted to mounting holding operations.

Such an interpretation of Justinian may seem to fall short of the heroic. Yet the man remains as fascinating as ever. If his ambitious plans were important, he was at least as remarkable for his energies, and these continued in play throughout the period of his rule, the second longest of any Byzantine emperor prior to the long reigns of the tenth century. But they only make sense in the context of late antiquity, to which we shall now turn.

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Chapter 1

EARLY YEARS

. . .

THE LATE ROMAN EMPIRE

In the time of the Roman empire the lands around the Mediterranean were knit together more closely than at any other period in human history. Spreading outwards from a peninsula in the centre of the sea, the arms of Rome had conquered a wide swathe of territory throughout which the imposition of the one government, the practice of Roman law, the use of a unified system of coinage and, ultimately, the existence of one state religion progressively tended to lessen regional distinctions. The empire constituted a vast, largely self-sufficient common market within which areas could specialize in the production of such items as grain, wine, oil, pottery and papyrus; every summer what Julius Caesar nonchalantly referred to as 'our sea' was filled with cargo ships. Its cohesiveness was displayed in the remarkable uniformity of its towns, from Britain to Syria, which a fine network of roads brought close together.

But as the centuries passed the political expression of this unity evaporated. Late in the third century the emperor Diocletian divided the empire into eastern and western parts, each with its own emperor, and in 324 his successor, Constantine, ordered the beginning of work on a 'new Rome' named after himself, not far from where Diocletian had based himself in the East. Constantinople, inaugurated in 330, was built on the site of Byzantium, a former colony Greeks had founded nearly a thousand years earlier. The site was a good one, for it controlled the straits which linked the Mediterranean and

Black seas and was the point where the continents of Europe and Asia approached each other more closely than anywhere else in the empire. It was also at the easternmost end of the Via Egnatia, an important road which ran almost due westwards to the coast of the Adriatic Sea, across which Italy was a short trip away, while on the other side of the Bosphorus was the terminus of the main highway leading towards Persia. So it was that Constantinople enjoyed excellent communications by both sea and land.

The work of Diocletian and Constantine marked a change in the political centre of gravity in an empire of which Rome had earlier been the undisputed centre. Subsequent dramatic events were to speed up this process. In the late fourth century a group of people called Visigoths crossed the Danube, and in 401 they invaded Italy. Before long the other key northern frontier, that of the Rhine, was seriously breached, and the effective reach of the western government was increasingly restricted until 476, when a barbarian strongman deposed the last Roman emperor in the West. Within the lifespans of a few generations all the provinces to the west of Croatia had been politically detached from those parts of the empire in the East.

The remaining portion of the empire was, at first site, a heterogeneous agglomeration of territories. In Europe, its western frontier ran northwards from the Adriatic coast to the Danube. On the other side of this border lay territories ruled from Italy, where the Ostrogoths were to establish a strong kingdom under their king Theoderic at the end of the fifth century. The border proceeded along the Danube to the Black Sea. The land to the north of the river remained the home of barbarians, as it had for centuries, but the hold of the empire on the Balkans had been weak for much of the fifth century, and the movement westwards of groups such as the Goths opened the way for other Germanic groups, as well as peoples of Hunnic and Slavic ethnicity, to move into the region. So it was that the government was unable to exercise effective power over much of the territory south of the Danube which was nominally part of the empire. The eastern border began at the south-eastern corner of the Black Sea, from which it proceeded in a southerly direction to the Euphrates. Here the empire's neighbour was Persia, a long-established and powerful state quite capable of looking its rival in the eye. From the Euphrates the border continued

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with a more westerly orientation across a desert populated by bedouin Arabs to Aqaba, whence it followed the Sinai peninsula and the west coast of the Red Sea. Much of the wealthy Nile valley was part of the empire, as was a strip of coastal territory to the west of Alexandria. Imperial territory came to an end at a point almost due south of its most westerly section in Europe.

A conventional way of periodizing history encourages us to see the sundering of the empire in the fifth century as constituting a dramatic break in the history of Europe. But care is called for, as it can certainly be argued that over most of the territories which came under the power of people the Romans called barbarians, although they did not call themselves this, the basic structures of society continued largely unchanged. To be sure, the rolling back of the imperial frontiers was impressive, but for generations power in the West had been passing from the state to such organs as the army, the landowning aristocracy, and the church, and over most of the lost territory these happily outlived a political apparatus which had been of steadily diminishing importance. Indeed, many Romans were pleased to accommodate themselves to the changed political realities, while many barbarians imitated the Romans as closely as they could. Oddly enough, the perception that the empire had ended in the West in 476 is first given explicit utterance in the chronicle of Marcellinus comes, who wrote in Constantinople in *c.* 518/519, and there is good reason to see this perception as an eastern rather than a western one.[1] However mild the response of many westerners to the redrawing of the map which occurred in the fifth century, the government of the east could hardly have looked on the process with equanimity.

Political life was not the only way in which the eastern and western parts of the old empire were moving apart. The export of the distinctive pottery which Africa had been shipping overseas in large quantities for centuries declined; the leading churches in each area, those of Rome in the West and Constantinople in the East, found themselves out of communion after 482; and government in Constantinople was increasingly conducted in the Greek language rather than the

1. B. Croke 'AD 476: The manufacture of a turning point' *Chiron* 13 1983: 81–119.

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Latin which continued to be used in the West. But the survival of the empire in the East was never in question. Its major political problem in the fifth century was a comparatively benign variant of the process which had brought imperial government in the West to an end. Whereas Italy had come during the fifth century to be controlled by barbarian generals who governed through puppet emperors and finally decided that the office of emperor was redundant, the East suffered from generals of provincial origin who felt themselves called to greater things. Such a man was Zeno, who made his way from his native soil in Isauria, an area in southern Asia Minor, to Constantinople. He was given a military command, married Ariadne, the daughter of the emperor Leo, and, on the death of his father-in-law, became emperor himself (474–491). Zeno's had been a stunning rise, at the end of which he had neither the name nor the wife with which he had begun. But his career was found worthy of imitation.

Indeed, his own reign was troubled by a series of attempts by generals to depose him. One of these was mounted by the brother-in-law of his predecessor Leo, but more serious were the challenges which came from his fellow Isaurians. When he died there was no obvious successor, and Ariadne's eye fell on an elderly administrator with strong but suspect religious interests, Anastasius, who was crowned emperor and then married the woman to whom he owed the throne. His reign (491–518) was not devoid of incident.[2] Zeno's brother had hoped to succeed the dead emperor, but Anastasius banished him to Egypt, where he later died of starvation, and within a few years a series of military actions had overcome the problems caused by the Isaurians. Another general, Vitalian, who seems to have had a barbarian father, led the troops under his command against Constantinople itself in 513, in 514, and again in 515, but was repulsed. There were also problems emanating from the church, repercussions of a widespread failure to accept the teaching of the council of Chalcedon (451), which led Anastasius to depose the patriarchs of Constantinople and Antioch in 511 and 512 respectively. But under Anastasius the empire enjoyed more peace than it had been used to. The emperor put his leisure to good use by introducing a new system of taxation and applied his

2. C. Capizzi *L'imperatore Anastasio I (491–518)* Rome 1969.

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administrative skill to bring about savings in the operations of government. He died in 518 leaving 320 000 pounds of gold in the treasury and a number of relatives who could hardly be blamed for being interested in exploiting his good reputation.

The death of the emperor was followed by one of the unexpected transfers of power so characteristic of the period. Anastasius had not groomed a successor. He had three nephews, Hypatius, Pompeius, and Probus, and a story was later told that on one occasion the old emperor, wondering which of them would succeed him, gave them lunch and then told them to take a nap in a room with three couches. Imperial insignia had been hidden under the pillow of one of the couches, and Anastasius waited to see which nephew would choose that couch. But none did. He then prayed that God would reveal who was to follow him on the throne, and one night was told that the first person to be announced to him the following morning would be his successor. Not surprisingly, this was the leader of the imperial bodyguard.[3] It is an interesting story, implying as it does that Anastasius' nephews, apparently the sons of his sister Caesaria,[4] had some claim to the throne, and as we shall see they were to remain an important element in succeeding reigns. But the tale also provides a context for the unexpected accession of Justin.

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THE NEW EMPEROR AND HIS NEPHEW

Following the death of Anastasius on 9 July 518 the senators were not able to agree on a successor. The most likely candidate, Hypatius, was serving as commander-in-chief in the East, and out of the city. Amantius, a powerful eunuch, bribed Justin, the leader of the bodyguard, to obtain its support for a claimant whom he hoped to control. But Justin spent the money winning support for himself, and on the next day he became emperor.[5] The new ruler could charitably be

3. Anonymous Valesianus 74–76, of which there is an inaccurate translation by J.C. Rolfe, in vol. 3 of his Loeb edition of Ammianus Marcellinus (London 1952).
4. Alan Cameron 'The house of Anastasius' *Greek Roman and Byzantine Studies* 17 1978: 259–76.
5. On Justin see A.A. Vasiliev *Justin the First* Cambridge Mass. 1950.

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described as a rough diamond. He had been born at the town of Bederiana near Niš, in an area where Latin rather than Greek was spoken, and, rather like Zeno, had made his way to Constantinople to follow a military career. He was said to have been illiterate, and his wife, apparently a barbarian, was thought to have been a slave and the concubine of another man before she caught Justin's eye and he bought her. On the elevation of her husband she changed her name from Lupicina, a name unfortunately similar to a slang word for prostitute, to Euphemia. The accession of such a man as Justin was unexpected, and contemporaries expressed surprise that members of the family of Anastasius had been elbowed aside (Procopius *Wars* 1.11.1). Given the tensions which had surrounded successions during recent decades, it was unlikely that members of the supplanted family would simply go away.

Justin began his reign with vigour. Letters were sent to pope Hormisdas announcing a change in ecclesiastical policy, and in the following year the schism which had separated the churches of Rome and Constantinople since 482 was healed, on the terms of the former. Zeno and Anastasius were condemned, an extraordinary concession by the man who succeeded them as emperor. Justin also moved rapidly to deal with potential enemies. Among them was Amantius, who became involved in disturbances in the cathedral of Hagia Sophia; within a few months he and the man he had hoped to install as emperor had been put to death. People whose careers had languished under Anastasius found themselves gaining preferment. The patrician Apion, a member of a famous Egyptian family, who had been sent into exile and ordained a priest in 510, was recalled and appointed praetorian prefect. Eminent soldiers who had been exiled by Anastasius were also recalled: one was appointed commander-in-chief of the forces of the East, and another enjoyed a consulate in 525.

But Justin did not come to power alone. Like every emperor, he was surrounded by a group of men who, naturally enough, found themselves competing for influence. Among them was Anastasius' old enemy Vitalian. Ambitious generals of his kind had long been a problem in the Roman empire, and they had been particularly prominent in the politics of the preceding century. No-one would have thought that their

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hour was passed.[6] Indeed, the rank to which Justin appointed Vitalian in 518, magister militum praesentalis, was that which Zeno had held immediately prior to becoming emperor in 474. Vitalian was to the fore in a group which met legates sent to Constantinople by pope Hormisdas in 519, and in 520 he held the office of consul. But in July of that year he was brutally murdered in the palace. Another important military figure was Germanus, a nephew of Justin, but he was a loyal officer whose office, that of commander-in-chief in Thrace, kept him removed from the palace and its intrigues.

In the royal city, power was in the hands of disparate people. There could be no doubting that the empress wielded significant influence, although we shall later see that this may have been less than some people thought, and other members of the emperor's family could be important in varying degrees. The eunuchs of the bedchamber, who controlled access to the emperor and empress, were in a position where they could wield power. Having become important in administration during the fourth century, they were notorious for their corrupt engagement in politics. Another well-positioned group was the imperial bodyguard, whose members were able to play a prominent political role; Justin was the first of three of its commanders who became emperors in the sixth century. The complex administration of the empire was in the hands of powerful officials. Chief among these was the praetorian prefect, who discharged a very mixed bag of responsibilities. He could almost be regarded as a deputy emperor, and one important holder of the office in the sixth century was accused of harboring imperial ambitions. There were also the quaestor, who had responsibility for legal affairs, the master of the offices, and various financial officials. The responsibilities attached to some of these positions were ill-defined, and so there was frequently rivalry between different parts of the administration. The chief positions were in the gift of the emperor, and they were traditionally enjoyed for short tenures, doubtless a device to prevent those who held them from gaining too much power. The upper reaches of the bureaucracy in the time of Justinian had changed little since major reforms in the fourth century, but one body in public life was

6. For the general context, see W.E. Kaegi *Byzantine Military Unrest 471–843. An Interpretation* Amsterdam 1981.

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far older. The senate, which traced its origins to early Rome, continued to meet in Constantinople. It was less distinguished in membership than that of Rome, and the functions it discharged, most of them advisory or of local import, were not onerous, but it was a place where traditionalist sentiments found a home.

So it was that, while the empire was effectively an autocracy, there were various positions which ambitious people could use to further interests which did not necessarily coincide with those of the emperor. Relatives, generals, eunuchs, bodyguards, administrators and senators all had places in the power structure which could easily be exploited. Among these the military men were the most dangerous, for successful generals such as Vitalian always had the potential to cause trouble. But it quickly became clear that the key figure in the group around Justin was the person everyone blamed for the murder of Vitalian. The emperor's nephew was the figure to watch.

Justinian, the son of Justin's sister and her husband Sabbatius, came from the same region as his uncle, having been born at the village of Tauresium, near Scupi, in about 482.[7] Nothing is known of his early life, but he followed his uncle to Constantinople where he occupied himself in making a name for himself; indeed, he had been mentioned as a possible emperor in 518. Early in Justin's reign he wrote many letters to the pope concerning the ending of the schism in which he can be seen letting the pope know that he played a special part in ecclesiastical affairs. He also built a church dedicated to SS Peter and Paul, for which he sought relics of the martyr S Laurence from Rome, and at some stage he mastered a good deal of the voluminous Greek theological literature of the period. He was also interested in foreign affairs, and cultivated Hilderic, a member of the royal house of the Vandals, before he became king of their African domain in 523. But most importantly, he took care to establish himself in Constantinople. As its name implies, the office of magister militum praesentalis in which he succeeded Vitalian in 520 allowed him to be present at the palace, and in 521 he held a consulship, which gave him an opportunity to make blatant

7. According to Zonaras (*Epitome* 14.5.40, ed. M. Pinder 1897), he was 42 when he became emperor in 527.

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attempts to win favour with both the people and the senators. The consular games at which he presided were spectacular, featuring 20 lions, 30 leopards and other wild beasts; in all, he spent 4000 pounds of gold. He sought the favour of members of the senate by giving them ivory diptychs bearing at the top his full name, Fl. Petrus Sabbatius Justinianus, and in central medallions a dedication: 'I, the consul, offer to my fathers these gifts, of little value but with deep respect'.[8]

No less than his uncle, Justinian was a provincial. He had been born in a part of the empire where Latin was the dominant language, and his laws contain several references to it as his native tongue, but letters he wrote to pope Hormisdas in Latin were composed in a clumsy and awkward fashion which contrasts to the smooth style in which the letters sent in Justin's name were composed by the chancery.[9] He must have cut a decidedly rustic figure in the capital. There was nothing sophisticated about his deep religious convictions. It was said that during Lent he lived on water and wild herbs pickled in salt and vinegar; a text of the tenth century states that he was once cured of a disease of the kidneys by drinking the water of a spring outside Constantinople. Perhaps there is little to wonder at here, for the Byzantine empire, while famous for its conservatism, was frequently ruled by people who had come up the hard way, with consequent tension between the boorish ways of the sovereign and the smart ways of the capital. As far as we can tell, Justinian was a modest man. According to John the Lydian, who knew him quite well, when he was emperor he could, in his humility, just tolerate being addressed as 'master', a word John glossed as 'good father' (*Powers* 1.6). In his *Buildings* Procopius described him in a phrase from Homer as being 'as gentle as a father' (1.1.15), and likeable characteristics emerge even in the bitterly hostile *Secret History*, for he could be described as approachable and kindly (13.1), an easy going man (15.11) who seemed good-natured (15.17). But in his early years in the royal city Justinian must have been feeling his way.

8. The diptychs are the only evidence for him bearing the names other than the last. There is a good representation in K. Weitzmann ed. *The Age of Spirituality* New York 1979 p. 51.
9. A.M. Honoré 'Some Constitutions composed by Justinian' *Journal of Roman Studies* 65 1975: 107–23.

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AN UNUSUAL WIFE

Justinian also equipped himself with a wife some years younger than he with an unusual past.[10] According to a famous story told by Procopius in his *Secret History* (9.1–32, 47–51), Theodora had an unsavoury background, her father having been a keeper of bears in the employ of the Green faction of the circus at Constantinople and her mother a professional dancer and actress. Following the death of her husband and the failure of the Greens to support her young family, Theodora's mother put her three daughters on the stage, and as Theodora, the second of the three sisters, grew she naturally turned towards a career as a prostitute. In time she became notorious throughout the city for her novel practices, lack of modesty, and gargantuan sexual appetite. Among her clients was one Hekobolos, who took her with him when he was appointed governor of Libya Pentapolis. But following a lovers' quarrel Theodora made her way back to Constantinople by way of Alexandria, earning a living by her accustomed means. When she was back in the royal city Justinian fell under her spell, and they began to live together. Justin's wife Euphemia, whose own background was scarcely distinguished, refused to hear of the couple getting married, and in any case the law prevented a senator from marrying a woman of Theodora's background. Only after the death of Euphemia did Justinian prevail upon Justin to issue a law which made their marriage possible.

It is an extraordinary tale which loses nothing by the degree of explicitness with which it is told, and the narrative has formed the basis of countless retellings by male historians with varying degrees of enjoyment and innuendo. None has carried the exercise off with greater style than Gibbon, who resorted to quoting passages of the Greek text of Procopius in footnotes, alleging that 'her murmurs, her pleasures, and her arts must be veiled in the obscurity of a learned language'.[11] Nudging and winking, of course, is precisely the

10. For what follows there is the study of H.-G. Beck *Kaiserin Theodora und Prokop* Munich 1986. Also of interest is the gallant study of Ch. Diehl *Théodora, impératrice de Byzance* Paris 1904.
11. Edward Gibbon *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* ed. J.B. Bury 4 London 1898 p. 213.

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response Procopius sought from his readers, but the extent to which his story is true is not immediately clear. The description of Theodora's sexual excesses is obviously designed to titillate, but this does not mean we have to write off all he says. We know from elsewhere that Theodora was a prostitute early in her life, and she is known to have had children before she married Justinian. While Hekobolos is known from no other source, an Egyptian text of the late seventh century states that Theodora met the patriarch Timothy of Alexandria. His tenure of office (517–535) fits comfortably with the period during which Procopius says she was in Alexandria, and her coming under his influence could account for the adherence to Monophysite Christianity she was later to display.

Procopius' narrative is also born out by a law enacted by Justin which, having been addressed to an official who was in office in 521/522 but had been replaced by 524, can be dated to this period.[12] Roman law prohibited a member of the aristocracy from marrying an actress. Further, not only was the condition of having been an actress life-long, but the children of an actor or actress could not marry people of senatorial rank. For that matter, neither could former slaves, such as Justin's wife Euphemia. But Euphemia probably married Justin before the latter acquired senatorial rank, and she may well have been not merely manumitted but made legally freeborn. Such a legal fiction would have nicely anticipated the law Justin enacted in the interests of Justinian and Theodora, which proclaims that an actress who desisted from her dishonourable profession could be 'so to speak handed back to her pristine, native condition'. She could therefore contract a marriage with whomever she chose. It can be seen that this would have neatly solved the difficulties of the couple, and when the law went on to declare the children subsequently born into such a marriage to be legitimate it betrays dynastic preoccupations.

We may take it, then, that there is a fair amount of truth in the story Procopius tells. But why did he deck it out with such inflammatory material? Perhaps because attacking the past of

12. Codex 5.4.23, well discussed by David Daube, 'The marriage of Justinian and Theodora. Legal and theological reflections' *Catholic University of America Law Review* 16 1966/7: 380–99, whom I follow. No source other than Procopius states that Euphemia was dead by then, but she certainly died before Justin, so a death before the time of the marriage is quite plausible.

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a woman who had died just a few years earlier offered him a way of expressing the disgust he had obviously come to feel for the government by the time he was writing in 550. As we shall see, there were those who were unhappy as Justinian's reign developed, and the contents of the *Secret History* reflect the state of mind of the author as much as what had really happened some decades earlier. There is no need to take the *Secret History* as a true guide to the subjects it discusses. Indeed, it is possible to respect Justinian's choice of wife. In a period when marriages were often contracted with an eye to the advantages a partner could bring, he chose a woman who could offer no possible benefit beyond what could be gained from an intelligent and resourceful spouse. She was also faithful; not even in Procopius' hostile account does a whisper of scandal touch her after she married Justinian.

That Justin was prepared to enact a special law in the interest of Justinian and his future wife is a pointer to the position his nephew occupied. Justinian was certainly ambitious: as early as 521 he had written to the pope of 'our state', implying that the empire was his to do with as he pleased, and it was widely believed that he was the power behind the throne. In the vivid image of Procopius, Justin was a donkey with flapping long ears, obedient to the one who pulled the reins (*Secret History* 8.3), and in later years the reign of Justinian was sometimes calculated as having included that of Justin.[13] But we may doubt whether Justinian enjoyed such power as people later thought he held. When he became emperor he immediately launched a number of major initiatives, and if he had been in a position to have gone ahead with these matters during the reign of Justin he surely would have done so, particularly given that he was well into his forties when his uncle died. As late as 526, when pope John visited Constantinople, he crowned Justin, but not Justinian. At some stage, however, Justin adopted his nephew, and on 1 April 527, as his end drew near, he made Justinian co-emperor.[14] Coins were

13. Procopius *Wars* 3.9.5.; *Secret History* 6.19, 18.45; *Buildings* 1.3.3 (ed. and trans. H.B. Dewing, London 1914–1940). If we accept that the *Secret History* was written in 550, Procopius reckons Justinian as having governed from 518: 18.33, 23.1, 24.29.

14. This was three days before Easter Day (Procopius *Secret History* 9.53; Zacharias rhetor *Historia ecclesiastica* 9.1 trans. E.W. Brooks *Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium* 42 (*Scriptores Syri* 6)). I cannot explain this odd choice.

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quickly minted showing the two emperors seated side by side. So it was that when Justin died from complications arising from an old wound in a foot on 1 August the succession caused no difficulties.

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THE NEW BROOM

Justinian approached government with the enthusiasm of a reforming head of state who had been waiting for years to enter office, and his early years as emperor were marked by a series of bold initiatives. But before turning to these it will be worth our while to examine how he dealt with a major piece of unfinished business.

The most important neighbour of the Roman empire was Persia. Relations between the two states were always difficult, and they had recently grown worse, for shah Kavad, who had ruled since 488, was increasingly concerned with the succession to his throne. He had a number of sons, but it was the third, Khusrau (Greek Chosroes), whom he wished to succeed him. With this end in view he approached Justin in about 525 asking the emperor to adopt Khusrau. Justin and Justinian were prepared to accept the unusual proposal, but they were dissuaded by the quaestor Proculus, a man of conservative convictions who believed that if Khusrau were to be adopted he would be in a position to lay claim to the Roman empire when the childless Justin died. The only fitting way for Justin to adopt Khusrau, he argued, would be by making him his 'son–in–arms'. There was recent precedent for this procedure, for not long after he became emperor Justin had adopted as his son in arms the man who seemed likely to take over the Gothic kingdom in Italy when the great king Theoderic died. But Kavad was not prepared to see his son treated in the same way as a Goth, and war followed.

The leaders of the Roman forces were a mixture of old and new faces. Hypatius, a nephew of the emperor Anastasius, was the commander-in-chief of the East, an office he had held on and off since late in his uncle's reign. His immediate subordinates, however, were from far more humble backgrounds. The commander in Armenia was Sittas, the bearer of an unusual name which may be Thracian or Gothic, and a man who had come to Justinian's attention while serving in his bodyguard. The duke of Mesopotamia was another officer from

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Justinian's bodyguard, Belisarius, who had come to Constantinople from his birth-place in what is now western Bulgaria. In 529, however, Hypatius was relieved of his post, the last military command he would ever enjoy, and replaced by Belisarius. The staff of this young general included Procopius, a scholarly man from Caesarea whose observations when campaigning against the Persians, Vandals and Ostrogoths were to form the basis of a major work of history.

Unfortunately, the early stages of Procopius' work are heavily biased in favour of Belisarius, but reading between the lines of his narrative it is clear that in the opening years of Justinian's reign the Roman forces were finding it difficult to hold their own against the Persians. A major victory was won in June 530, when they put a large invading force to rout near the stronghold of Daras, and we know of one and possibly two equestrian statues of Justinian erected to commemorate it. But in the following year Belisarius, following a defeat at Callinicum by the Euphrates River, was summoned back to Constantinople. It has sometimes been thought that he was recalled because Justinian proposed to send him to make war on the Vandals in Africa, but the only evidence for this interpretation is two passages in Procopius which were almost certainly concocted to conceal the unpleasant reality that the general had been recalled because of his incompetence.[15] The outlook was not encouraging, but in September Kavad died and Khusrau, whose grip on the throne was not strong, sought peace. After a good deal of haggling a treaty was duly agreed to in 532.

The terms of the peace may seem to have favoured Persia. While each side was to return the territory it had won during the war, the Roman duke of Mesopotamia was henceforth to

15. Robert Browning *Justinian and Theodora* rev. edn London 1987 p. 77; John Julius Norwich *Byzantium the Early Centuries* London 1988 p. 206. It is true that Procopius asserts that Belisarius was recalled so he could lead the expedition to Africa (*Wars* 1.21.2, 3.9.25). But at this stage of his narrative Procopius was happy to distort the facts in favour of Belisarius, and here he simply attempts to conceal the unpleasant reality that his hero was relieved of his command and recalled after the incompetence and cowardice he displayed at the battle of Callinicum (John Malalas 464, 466; Zacharias rhetor *Historia ecclesiastica* 9.6); in another passage of the *Wars* (2.21.34) he uses a very similar form of words to hide a similar unpleasant reality (see further below p. 98).

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reside at Constantina rather than the forward site of Daras which had been fortified at great cost by Anastasius, and the Romans were to pay 11 000 pounds of gold. Some historians have argued that Justinian's agreeing to pay such a high price indicates that he wished to free himself to make war elsewhere.[16] But it is hard to accept this. It is not surprising that Justinian agreed to make some payment. The Persians argued that by manning defences in the Caucasian Passes they were serving Roman as well as their own interests, so that it was reasonable for the Romans to contribute to their upkeep. Whatever degree of plausibility attached to this argument, it is hard to escape the conclusion that the Persian government looked on the empire as a useful source of revenue, for Persian attacks on imperial territory were often no more than plundering expeditions. But while 11 000 pounds of gold may have represented desirable income to Persia, Justinian may have thought that it was well spent. In 521, after all, he had been prepared to spend 4000 pounds on the celebration of his consulship. In 468 Zeno had spent over ten times this sum on a futile expedition against the Vandals in Africa, and in 545, when Justinian negotiated a peace with Persia which was to last for just five years, he paid 5000 pounds. By these standards the peace of 532 offered remarkably good value, for it was to be permanent. Justinian himself, according to the text of a law, seriously believed that the peace would last for ever.[17] As it turned out this expectation was woefully optimistic, for Khusrau was to open hostilities again in 540. But this occurred after a radical shift in the balance of power between the states which Justinian can hardly be held to blame for not anticipating.

The early years of Justinian's reign were also characterized by intense diplomatic activity on a number of fronts, which it will be as well to consider later. But external affairs were not

16. A.H.M. Jones *The Later Roman Empire 284–602* Oxford 1964 p. 273, and apparently E. Stein *Histoire du bas-empire* 2 Paris 1949 p. 295. Yet Khusrau seems to have had the greater need for peace, and the only source to make a connection between the peace with Persia and the onset of the Vandal war in the following year is Procopius, in the two passages cited in the preceding note.
17. This is the only way of interpreting a phrase in a law of 534, which states that through Christ Justinian had 'ratified with the Persians a peace for all time to come (in aeternum)': Codex 1.27.2pr.

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the only concern of the new emperor. Another aspect of the activity of this period were the moves he took against people who were not orthodox Christians.

Correct belief in matters of religion was of the greatest importance to Justinian, a religious enthusiast who had transformed himself into a competent theologian. Unfortunately he was a man of settled opinions, able to issue a law which contained the passing observation 'we hate heretics' (novel 45pr.), and he never wavered from firm convictions. One important group of Christians whom Justinian considered deviates, the Monophysites, were spared his attentions, for reasons we shall consider later. But for other groups, the coming to power of Justinian marked the onset of persecution. Shortly after he had become co-emperor with Justin in April 527 a persecution of Manicheans, adherents of a dualist form of belief originating in Persia, was set under way. Some of them were put to death. This policy was carried out in accordance with a law passed some decades earlier, but at the beginning of his reign Justinian extended the applicability of the penalty so that it also applied to people who had been baptized but secretly engaged in pagan practices. Sometimes Justinian used to debate with Manicheans, and those who proved stubborn were burned. Doubtless the Persian origin of their belief made them particularly undesirable, but they were not the only group to suffer persecution.

Action was also taken against the Samaritans, people who claimed to follow the original teachings of the first five books of the Bible and who had a history of rebellious behaviour. In a law published between 527 and 529 Justinian ordered the destruction of their synagogues, and took away their right to bequeath property to people of non-orthodox belief. Many Samaritans in Palestine pretended to embrace Christianity, but in the summer of 529 others revolted, crowning one Julian as their ruler. The time was well chosen, for during that year an Arab ruler who was allied to Persia, al-Mundhir, invaded Syria and penetrated as far as Antioch. Julian found himself leading a movement which attracted considerable popular support. He based himself at Nabulus, not far from Mt Gerizim, the holy place of the Samaritans, where he presided over the chariot races, just as the emperor did in Constantinople. Lack of co-ordination between the Roman civil and military authorities worked in favour of the rebels, but when

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an army was sent against Julian he was defeated. His head and the diadem he had worn were sent to Justinian. The Samaritans did not find such treatment to their liking, and during the following year it was discovered that a group of them was planning to betray Palestine to Persia, a move which was quashed. Similar measures were enacted against the Montanists, a group in Phrygia which had broken away from the church as early as the second century. In despair they shut themselves in their churches, which they then set alight.

Much milder was Justinian's policy towards the Jews. By the early sixth century they were subject to a variety of legal disabilities, and a body of clerical opinion was not well disposed to them. It was the practice of a Monophysite holy man, Sergius, to gnash his teeth and assert that those who had crucified Christ did not deserve to live. With a band of followers he destroyed a synagogue near Amida, and built a church dedicated to the Theotokos[18] where it had stood. Needless to say, attempts to erect a new synagogue were successfully thwarted. Justinian's early flurry of legislation against non-Christian groups left the Jews largely untouched. But changes were made in their position, for the worse: for example, whereas previously Jews had been allowed to keep Christian slaves provided they respected their religion, henceforth no Jew was to have a Christian as a slave.

As time passed, however, more measures were taken against them. In 535 Justinian ordered that the synagogues of Africa were to be turned into churches, together with what were described as the 'caves' of pagans and heretics; it is not surprising that in the following year, when one of Justinian's armies was seeking to take Naples from the Ostrogoths, the Jews of the town were to the fore in urging resistance to the Roman army.[19] He is reported to have ordered that the Passover was never to be celebrated ahead of Easter, and he certainly intervened in the conduct of synagogue worship. In 553 a curious law was published which provided that a

18. Literally 'God-bearer', the term by which Byzantines most commonly referred to the Virgin Mary. Its technical meaning is discussed below, p. 121.
19. An odd story told in Procopius *Buildings* 6.2.21–23 may represent the application of the African policy. There is no indication that the far larger Jewish communities of Italy suffered in such a way following the Gothic war.

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translation of the Jewish Bible rather than the original Hebrew text could be read in synagogues; the Septuagint was recommended as the best translation into Greek, in preference to that which Aquila, a convert of the second century, had produced. He also forbad the use of the Mishnah and ordered that Jews who denied the resurrection, the last judgment or the creation of angels were to be expelled from their communities. It is hard to imagine the Jewish community welcoming such interference in their affairs.

The early years of Justinian's reign were also important for a development in the high culture of the empire. By the sixth century non-Christians in the west could be looked down on as 'pagans', a disparaging word which seems to have meant 'country folk',[20] but in the east they were called 'Hellenes', implying that they were familiar with the sophisticated thought of Greece. To be sure, there were still non-Christians living in parts of the countryside, and in 542 Justinian sent John of Ephesos to Asia Minor to preach against them. He began his work in the hills near Tralles in Lydia, and as the decades passed he enjoyed remarkable success, being said to have baptized 70 000 or 80 000 pagans. Earlier, Justinian had ordered that all pagans were to present themselves for instruction in the Christian faith and, thereafter, baptism; the property of any who failed to comply was to be confiscated, and they were to be exiled. Such people were also forbidden to teach or receive any income from the state. Indeed, we are told of a decree posted in every city of the empire which gave pagans a period of three months to accept orthodox belief; those who failed to do so were to be exiled (John Malalas 449). However, such a decree is not to be found among the laws collected in Justinian's great Codex, and may never have been issued. There was some concern in church circles about the sincerity of pagans who presented themselves for baptism and of schismatics who came forward to take communion. Persecution was directed against some distinguished persons, such as Thomas the quaestor, one of the legal experts working on a new Code of law, who was arrested in 529, and Phocas, a patrician who was to commit suicide later in a subsequent period of persecution.

20. It is possible, however, that the word may have been used in another sense, with the meaning 'civilians'.

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Such activities on the part of the state formed the background to a development with important consequences in intellectual history. In the fifth century Athens had become the home of a group of keen Neoplatonic philosophers. In about 430 a young philosopher, Proclus, had arrived there, and for the ensuing five decades he advocated in his teaching and writing a Neoplatonism which was both explicitly non-Christian and intellectually attractive, even to Christians; among those who drew on him was an important Christian author of a slightly later period who is generally known as pseudo-Dionysios. One of the pupils of Proclus, Agapius, lectured in Constantinople, where his lectures were attended by John, a Lydian who had come to Constantinople at the age of twenty-one seeking a career, while another, Ammonius, returned to his hometown, Alexandria, to publish distinguished work on a variety of topics and teach a galaxy of brilliant students. Ammonius was a pagan, but was able to come to some agreement with the patriarch of Alexandria. His students were of diverse persuasions. One of them, John Philoponos, was a Monophysite Christian who attacked the teaching of Proclus that the world was eternal, but he was himself criticized by another of Ammonius' students, the pagan Simplicius, who made his way to Athens, where a third student of Ammonius, the Syrian Damascius, was head of the Neoplatonist school. Early in the sixth century Athens was home to some distinguished scholars, some of whose works survive, the products of minds and intellectual traditions of real distinction.

Byzantine intellectual culture in late antiquity was subject to currents which flowed in different directions. A fire which broke out in Constantinople in 475 is said to have destroyed 120 000 books, among them an illustrated roll of Homer written on the intestines of snakes in letters of gold, 120 feet long.[21] But the contemporaries of the thinkers we have been considering included people with very different interests, such as Romanos Melodos, the most famous writer of hymns in the history of Byzantium. He was a Syrian who had found his way to Constantinople during the reign of Anastasius, yet another of the important figures of the time to have come to

21. P. Lemerle *Byzantine Humanism* trans. Helen Lindsay and Ann Moffatt Canberra 1986 p. 71.

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the capital from a distant province. There he wrote hymns which unashamedly relish the paradoxes inherent in the Christian doctrines of the incarnation and resurrection. For the great writers of classical Greece he felt nothing but contempt:

> Why do the Greeks snort and chatter?
> Why do they make a show of Aratus, the thrice-accursed?
> Why are they led into error by Plato?
> Why do they love Demosthenes, the weak?
> Why do they not see that Homer is a flitting dream?
> Why do they keep talking about Pythagoras who is justly to be muzzled?[22]

The hymns of Romanos were popular in their time and have never ceased being copied, sung and imitated. So it was that by the early sixth century the philosophers were aware of swimming against the tide. Some time after the accession of Khusrau to the throne of Persia in December 531 a group of seven of them, depressed at the status Christianity had gained in the empire, made their way to his domain, in the hope of finding there a land ruled by the kind of philosopher king of whom Plato had written.[23] They included Damascius and Simplicius of Cilicia, a pupil of both Ammonius and Damascius, although not all of their party need have been from Athens. But the philosophers were hard to please. They were soon disillusioned with Persia, and when Khusrau and Justinian concluded their peace treaty in 532 its provisions included a clause allowing them to return home and continue the practice of their old beliefs.

22. Romanos Melodos hymn 33.17, trans. Marjorie Carpenter *Kontakia of Romanos, Byzantine Melodist* 1 *On the Person of Christ* Columbia Missouri 1970 p. 367. Romanos is best approached by way of H. Hunger 'Romanos Melodos, Dichter, Prediger, Rhetor – und sein Publikum' *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik* 34 1984: 15–42.
23. Note the important study of Alan Cameron, 'The last days of the Academy at Athens' *Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society* 195 1969: 7–29. The assertion of John Malalas (451) that in 530 a law forbad the teaching of philosophy at Athens and prohibited the Athenians from gambling, apparently because gamblers had been detected in Constantinople uttering appalling blasphemies, has no more weight than the suggestions of archeologists that statues and busts found in a well in Athens were placed there in response to anti-pagan measures in 529.

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This they did. We know an epigram composed by Damascius in 538 at Emesa. But there is good reason to believe that Simplicius and some if not all of the scholars made their way to Harran, a town near the Persian frontier in northern Mesopotamia.[24] Its inhabitants were staunch devotees of the old religion: in 363 the emperor Julian had offered sacrifice there while on his way to fight the Persians, and the last pagan temple in the town was only destroyed late in the eleventh century. The temple, however, was not the only centre of pagan activity in Harran. There is also evidence that the town, for centuries after the coming of the Arabs, remained home to a Neoplatonic school, and it may well have been there that the scholars returning from Persia after the peace of 532 settled. It is certainly true that paganism in the eastern parts of the empire was a long time dying. In about 579 a leading citizen of Edessa, a town some 40 kilometres from Harran which was famed for the strength of its Christianity, was found guilty of being a pagan and condemned to torture, being thrown to the beasts and crucifixion. Not for the last time, one wonders at the gap between Justinian's ambitions and his achievement.

This aside, there can be no mistaking the energy displayed by Justinian in the opening years of his reign. Like many other reforming heads of state, he lost no time in surrounding himself with assistants who were themselves new to office. In 530, as we have seen, the commander-in-chief in the East, Belisarius, and the magister militum praesentalis, Sittas, were both former officers in Justinian's bodyguard. Belisarius had married an older woman of a questionable past who was close to Theodora, while Sittas had shown more ambition in marrying Komito, Theodora's elder sister. Following the dismissal of Thomas the quaestor in 529, this important civil office was filled by Tribonian, a lawyer from an obscure background in Pamphylia. Waiting in the wings were John, a man from the Cappodocian town of Caesarea whose career in the bureaucracy was moving ahead rapidly thanks to the patronage of Justinian, Narses, an Armenian eunuch of the sacred bedchamber, and Solomon, another eastern eunuch who was serving in the household of Belisarius. One is confronted with

24. See the fascinating study of M. Tardieu '«Sābiens» coraniques et «Sābiens» de Hārran' *Journal asiatique* 274 1986: 1–44.

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a group of talented people of humble backgrounds whose careers were starting to take off early in the reign of Justinian. The new emperor would owe much to them, but they, dependent on his patronage, would owe more to him. Inevitably, before long many of them were to be the subjects of hostility and gossip.

But if their servants had risen from obscurity, how much more could this be said of the emperor from the backwoods and his disreputable spouse? Tongues were ready to wag; early in his reign reports reached Justinian that Probus, a nephew of Anastasius, had been slandering him, but he decided not to pursue the matter. He and his wife set about the business of government with all the spendthrift vulgarity of the nouveau riche. Justinian's first consulship had been expensive, but when he held his second in 528 it was thought that the largesse distributed was on a scale unmatched by any earlier emperor on becoming consul. When Theodora set out in the summer of the following year for the town of Pythion in Bythinia, to enjoy the hot springs which were popular with the inhabitants of Constantinople, she travelled in style, to a town which was to do well from the beneficence of the emperor: a palace, public baths, and an aqueduct were all built there during the reign of Justinian, while improvements were made to a church and an infirmary. Theodora was accompanied thither by a mixed entourage of patricians, eunuchs of the bedchamber and other staff, to the number of 4000. Among those in her party was the count of the sacred largesse, the chief minister of finance, whose presence must have been useful, for Theodora made many gifts to churches, poorhouses and monasteries. Doubtless such generosity had a purpose, but her unashamed display must have grated on members of the prestigious and wealthy families which had been in Constantinople for generations. They can only have wondered at the direction the government was taking under Justinian, his remarkable wife, and those who were beginning to prosper under their patronage.

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Chapter 2

THE MAJESTY OF THE EMPEROR

. . .

REFORM OF THE LAWS

One of the supreme achievements of Roman civilization was law. At its best this provided an efficient administration of justice within a framework of highly developed intellectual principles. The endeavours of the Romans in this field have won the admiration of many others, and even now it is hard not to be moved by the words of Ulpian, an author of the early third century: 'Justice is a fixed and everlasting desire to give to each person what is properly just ... These are the precepts of the law: to live honourably, not to harm another, to render to each person what is rightly theirs'.

Yet all was not well with Roman law in late antiquity. For centuries emperors had been enthusiastically issuing new constitutions. A particularly dangerous practice was the issuing of rescripts, in which specific questions were answered in terms which did not necessarily agree with the general principles of the law but which nevertheless themselves had the force of law. Further, laws were not systematically published, and to make matters worse the imperial archives did not always keep copies of new legislation, so that lawyers and judges found it difficult to determine what the law was on specific points. Another problem was the jungle of opinions on points of law offered by the learned jurisconsults of the second and third centuries, which were sometimes contradictory and often hard of access. Towards the end of the third century two collections of laws were published, and attempts were made in the following years to update them. But as time

passed their usefulness diminished, and the practical administration of justice remained difficult. In 426 the western emperor Valentinian III had attempted to deal with these problems by ordering that the opinions of just five commentators could be cited before the courts; the opinions of some earlier writers cited by them could also be taken cognisance of, on condition that the passages containing these opinions were confirmed by a comparison of manuscripts. When the opinions of the commentators differed, the opinion of the majority was to be accepted; if the numbers were equally divided, the authority of the group which included Papinian, a jurist of the second century, was to be accepted.

Theodosius II, an eastern emperor, took a more important step. In 427 and again in 434 he set up commissions to prepare a new collection of the laws issued since 312. The outcome was the Theodosian Code, which was issued in 438. We still have the minutes of the meeting of the senate in Rome which was held when the code was issued. As was their wont on such occasions, the senators broke into acclamations, many of which reveal concern at the way the law was operating. Among other things, the senators wanted many copies of the Code to be made for the state offices, copies to be kept under seal, copies to be written out in full to prevent interpolations, and the promulgation of no new laws in response to petitions. These anxieties are extraordinary testimony to the inability of the state to make its laws known, the danger of illicit emendations being made, and the threat posed by ad hoc legislation. Some of these problems arose from inefficiencies which were doubtless beyond the power of any pre-modern administration to deal with. But others were of such a kind as to pose a challenge to a vigorous emperor. Such an emperor was Justinian.

On 13 February 528, comfortably within his first year as emperor, he appointed a commission to produce a new code of imperial law.[1] It comprised ten experts chaired by one John,

1. Very important work in this area has been done by Tony Honoré, in particular in his *Tribonian* London 1978, which makes important points about Justinian as well as its subject. In some respects, however, such as his conclusions as to the precise divisions into committees and the timetables to which they worked, his findings are controversial: W. Waldstein 'Tribonianus' *Zeitschrift der Savigny-Stiftung für Rechtsgeschichte* Romanistische Abteilung 98 1980: 232–55, and D.J. Osler 'The composition of Justinian's Digest' ibid. 102 1985: 129–84.

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who had formerly held the office of quaestor, or chief legal officer of the empire, and was to take in hand the contents of the three collections made in the preceding centuries as well as the various supplementary new laws, technically termed 'novels,' issued since the Theodosian Code was promulgated. The mass of material was to be systematized and simplified. The commission carried out its task with great efficiency, and the Codex Justinianus was published on 7 April 529.

One success led to another. On 15 December 530 a commission of 16 was set to work on a more demanding task, that of codifying the works of the Roman jurists. It was said that the state of the laws, which went back to the time of Romulus, was so disordered that it was beyond human power to take its measure. Some said that the job could not be done, or that it would take ten years, and Justinian's practice of keeping a close eye on the activities of the commissioners need not have been conducive to its efficiency. But the team discharged its responsibilities amazingly well. At its head was a highly skilled lawyer, Tribonian, who had already served on the commission which had prepared the Code. The commission claimed to have worked through 2000 books, a 'book' being notionally the length of a papyrus roll, and to have read three million lines. The outcome of its labours, the Digest or 'Pandects' as they were called in Greek, was published on 16 December 533. A remarkable feat of compression, it amounted to 50 books and 150 000 lines. Justinian hoped that the work would be definitive: no commentaries were to be made on it, although it would be permissible to make indexes and supply headings, while literal translations into Greek were also acceptable. Some of the steps which were taken may seem extreme: thus, the numbers of the sections of the Digest were to be written out in full, rather than expressed as numerals. But they express a desire to prevent corruption of the text and, hence, for the efficient exercise of the will of the emperor.

Meanwhile, a committee consisting of Tribonian and the leading academic lawyers of Constantinople and Beirut had also been preparing a short textbook for the use of students. A preface, addressed to 'young men desirous of the laws', encouraged its readers to work hard and relish the prospect of holding posts in the government at the end of their study. Towards its beginning stood the words from Ulpian quoted at the beginning of this chapter. This work, which is heavily

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indebted to Gaius, a lawyer of the second century, was published as the Institutes on 21 November 533. Finally, a revised version of the Codex Justinianus which took into account developments since 529 was prepared, and it was published on 16 November 534.

The energy with which these works were produced and their degree of success are both astonishing. They constituted the final, definitive form of Roman law. But Justinian's legislative achievement did not end with them. In 535 he began to issue novels which supplemented or replaced earlier legislation, of which a large number were compiled after he died. Unlike the Digest, Code and Institutes, which were cast in Latin, the traditional language of Roman law, the great bulk of the novels were issued in Greek. Over half the novels promulgated during Justinian's reign were issued in the 530s, and some of them dealt with important issues.

Among the needs which Justinian felt was that of overhauling the administration of the provinces to make it more efficient and less corrupt, and a series of novels dealt with piecemeal reform to this end. One novel, citing the biblical teaching 'the love of money is the root of all evils', and acknowledging the advice received from Theodora, stated that provincial governors and other high officials were to take an oath that they had not made any payments for being appointed to office. The sale of offices was an old and intractable problem, but the issue was important, for it was feared that governors who paid for office would be led into exploiting the provincials, and they could easily find themselves owing favours. But Justinian, like many other rulers, found it impossible to control his officials. When the inhabitants of a village in Egypt sent a petition complaining about the behaviour of a tax collector there was little he could do. Other legislation changed the administrative set-up of a number of provinces, in particular by amalgamating civil and military power. Here Justinian was striking out in a more radical direction. For centuries the separation of civil and military authority had been a fixed policy, but as the initial success of the Samaritan revolt of 529 indicated it was not necessarily a good one, and by bringing together the two areas of competence Justinian was anticipating later developments in Byzantine history. Officials in the provinces were given increased

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authority to hear appeals, so as to keep litigants away from the capital.

Marriage and sexual matters were other areas occupying Justinian's attention. A law of 534 dealt with the problem of prostitution. Constantinople, the law complained, was full of brothels, staffed by women who had been enticed from the country, some of them were mere girls, less than ten years old. The keeping of brothels in the city was henceforth forbidden. Perhaps we are to see here the influence of Theodora, whose shady background led her to take an interest in the plight of women trapped in prostitution. She was certainly involved in the transformation of a palace on the Asian shore of the Bosphorus into a convent which housed former prostitutes, although not all the women placed there seem to have been happy with their new way of life, and was known to have bought girls out of prostitution. In 536 a long law on marriage was published; among its provisions lurked the implication that marriages could be dissolved. The status of concubines was another matter to receive attention, and here a liberal policy prevailed, the inheritance rights of a man's faithful partner and their children being improved.

When it came to male homosexuals, however, there was no mercy. As early as 528 some bishops accused of homosexual practices were summoned to Constantinople. One of them was tortured and exiled, while another was castrated and paraded through the city. Justinian ordered that, henceforth, those guilty of this offence were to be castrated. The Institutes had legislated against homosexual behaviour (4.18.4), and in 535 a novel was published which drew a grim lesson from Scripture: the just wrath of God punished not only those who committed deeds against nature but also the cities in which they lived, so that famine, earthquakes and disease could be expected as a result of their activities (novel 77.1). They were to be put to death. The penalty applied only to male homosexuals, lesbians escaping the attention of the law. It may be significant that another novel dealing with male homosexuals was published in 559 (novel 141), the year after an outbreak of the plague in Constantinople.

'We are lovers of chastity, but we know that there is nothing more powerful than sexual madness.' (novel 74.4pr.) The expression is borrowed from Plato (*Laws* 839B) but the sentiment is Christian, and it is clear that Justinian's legislation

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represents a compromise between a desire to impose proper standards of Christian behaviour and the knowledge that people could not be expected to act as he would have wished. Divorce was a particularly difficult area, because the exacting standards taught by the church conflicted with both pre-Christian legislation and the wishes of many citizens of the empire. In 528 Justinian had provided a new reason for divorce, the failure of the husband to consummate a marriage within two years (Codex 5.17.10) But a law of 542 reduced the grounds for divorce and explicitly denied divorce by mutual consent (novel 117.8) In some respects the law improved the position of women, who could now divorce husbands who were unfaithful, made false accusations of adultery, or were held captive, but women who sought to divorce their husbands on grounds other than those specified were to be handed over to the local bishop and sent to a convent (117.13), and from 548 men seeking to act in this way were committed to monasteries (novel 127). But in 566 Justinian's successor, Justin II, was to admit defeat. Although Justinian had prohibited divorce by mutual consent, his successor was aware of many cases where peoples' lives were being made a misery by domestic battles and combats, and restored this ground for divorce (novel 140).

Doubtless ultimate fine-tuning of the laws was impossible. In the early 530s Justinian must have looked on his legal endeavours as having been overwhelmingly successful. The immense effort which went into them and the measure of success which attended them naturally encouraged a certain arrogance. At one point in the Institutes Justinian is represented as striving to surpass Augustus (2.23.12), but this is nothing compared to a passage in the constitution describing how work on the Digest came to be undertaken. It asserted that before Justinian's reign no-one had hoped for such an achievement, the pathway of the laws, which came down from the founding of Rome and the time of Romulus, being so hard to follow that it went on for ever (constitution *Deo auctore*). But who could blame Justinian, amid the achievements of the first years of his reign, for feeling buoyant? Pieces of legislation issued in 535–537 introducing reforms in provincial administration contain important prefaces, almost certainly written by the quaestor Tribonian, which contrive to suggest classical antecedents, frequently spurious, for the reforms being imposed. It may well be that they, too, reflect continuing

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optimism.[2] But this is to anticipate matters which will concern us later.

Justinian's legislation suggests a persistent interest in the situation of women, and as we have suggested with reference to the issue of prostitution, it may not be fanciful to see the influence of Theodora here. This raises the general question of the position of the empress during Justinian's reign, and it will be worth our while to broach it now.

. . .

THE POWER OF THE EMPRESS

In his *Secret History*, Procopius painted an alarming picture of Justinian having been under the thumb of his wife, a situation he suggested may have been brought about by sorcery (22.28, 32). No-one would take his statements at face value, but as with his lurid account of Theodora's early days it may be that some truth lay behind the exaggerations. John the Lydian described her as 'co-reigning' with Justinian (*Powers* 3.69), while Zonaras, an author of the twelfth century, believed that her power had been greater than that of her husband (*Epitome* 14.6.1, 5f). One of Justinian's laws mentions his having taken counsel with 'the most pious spouse whom God has given us' (novel 8.1, issued in 535) and provided the wording of an oath by which holders of office were to swear good service 'to our most holy lords Justinian and Theodora, the wife of his majesty' (ibid., *ad fin.*) Inscriptions were erected 'in the most happy times of our lords Justinian and Theodora', and the estates of the empress, which had their own administration, gave her economic independence. During the last desperate years of their kingdom in the 530s the sovereigns of the Ostrogoths found it worth their while to address five letters to her. From one of these we learn that Theodora had told king Theodahad that any matters which were to be placed before Justinian should be brought to her prior notice.[3] Given this, it would

2. See the important study of Michael Maas 'Roman history and Christian ideology in Justinian's reform legislation' *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 40 1986 pp. 17–31, where the rhetoric of the prefaces is seen as a bid for support from various elements.

3. Cassiodorus *Variae* 10.20.2 (ed. Th. Mommsen, *Monumenta Germaniae Historica Auctores Antiquissimi* 12; trans. S.J.B. Barnish, Liverpool 1992); the other letters addressed to Theodora are 10.10 (from Amalasuintha), 10.21 (from Theodahad's wife Gudeliva), 10.23 (from Theodahad) and 10.42 (from Gudeliva).

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not have been surprising had Theodora played a role in the framing of legislation.

Some years before her death Theodora had displayed power in moving against one of her husband's chief officials, John the Cappadocian. She brought it about that John's daughter was befriended by Antonina, the wife of Belisarius, who led her on to say that John would co-operate with Belisarius in a coup against Justinian. John fell into the trap. In 541 Antonina arranged for him to pledge himself to move against the emperor while friends of Theodora were secretly listening. John fled to a church and later took holy orders, being assigned to a church near Cyzicus. Justinian retained a friendly interest in his former minister, and saw to it that a large part of the property which had been confiscated from him was returned. But imperial favour was not enough to shield him from his enemies. Before long John, now accused of murdering the bishop of Cyzicus, was beaten with rods and exiled to Egypt, and his house was given to Belisarius. In 545 Theodora sought to revive the charge that John had been responsible for the murder of the bishop, but to no avail. Only after Theodora had died did Justinian recall him to Constantinople.[4]

Yet one wonders. Theodora's name did not appear on coins. Her power cannot be compared to that exercised during the preceding century at the court of Theodosius II by his sister Pulcheria, who was quite capable of fostering developments in the cult of the Theotokos to her advantage, and to a lesser extent by his wife Eudocia.[5] Indeed, it may be that the accusations of intrigue which her enemies levelled against Theodora, such as an implausible claim that fear lest the attractive Gothic queen Amalasuintha become a rival for her husband's affections caused her to see to the murder of the woman, are themselves indicative of a lack of genuine power.[6]

4. The basic source for the fall of John is Procopius *Wars* 1.15.13–44 (ed. and trans. H.B. Dewing, London 1914–1940), but Theodora's involvement is also clear from John the Lydian *Powers* 3.69 (ed. and trans. A.C. Bandy *On Powers* Philadelphia 1983).
5. K.G. Holum *Theodosian Empresses: Women and Power in Late Antiquity* Berkeley Calif. 1982.
6. Procopius *Secret History* 16.1–6 (ed. and trans. H.B. Dewing, London 1914–1940). The charge is implausible because Justinian never displayed 'fickleness' of the kind Theodora is said to have feared.

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Mosaics which were installed in the church of S Vitale at Ravenna not long before Theodora died (see below pp. 112–15) are interesting in this connection. They show Justinian in the company of clergy, an archbishop among them, of secular men whose dress marks them out as the holders of high office, and of his bodyguard. Theodora, on the other hand, is shown with two men and a following of seven ladies in waiting, but the latter were not considered important, for the mosaicists only bothered to take pains with the faces of the two of them nearest the empress. Justinian spent his life surrounded by men of power, whereas Theodora did not. The resources available to her were not to be despised, but they were much more limited than those Justinian could mobilize, and in a sense 'illegitimate', for they were not those through which power was formally exercised. In other words, they were of precisely the kind liable to be given exaggerated importance by people who distrusted her, and perhaps would have been made uneasy by any woman with an appearance of strength. Theodora certainly had character and possessed enough power to help the advancement of her friends and orchestrate the fall of some of her enemies, but it was limited. As we shall see she was not able to secure the victory of the theological cause to which she was strongly committed.

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RIOTS IN THE CAPITAL

By the time of Justinian Constantinople was home to some hundreds of thousands of people. The massive walls built by Theodosius II early in the fifth century enclosed fourteen hectares, but the site was not fully built up, and the inhabitants of Constantinople, like those of cities in the modern world with a high density of population, lived largely out of doors. The broad main street of the city, the Mese, was flanked by shops, in accordance with a trend in late antiquity for the agora or forum of earlier times to be replaced by colonnaded streets as the centre of retail activity, a development which pointed the way towards the souk familiar in middle eastern countries today. One has the feeling of the city's people living cheerful lives, largely in public. Early in Justinian's reign they were able to see a wonderful dog which had, among other abilities, the power of detecting pregnant women, brothel keepers, adulterers, misers, and the magnanimous (John

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Malalas 453). Many must have found the animal's prowess disconcerting, yet throngs formed around it and its master.

The amenities of the city were certainly such as to cater for people who lived in public. The citizens had at their disposal a number of heated bath-houses, decorated with impressive statues. But the most important place where the people of the city congregated was the Hippodrome, capable of seating perhaps 100 000 spectators at the chariot races. Built in imitation of the Circus Maximus in Rome on a site immediately flanking the palace, no less than the bath-houses it represented continuity with a classical, urban past. The size of the crowds made it the place where public feelings could be expressed most directly. Intellectuals were accustomed to gather by the bookshops near the Basileios Stoa, where they engaged in acrimonious controversy on theological issues. Outdoor processions organized by the church were another way in which communal feeling was expressed, as were the services conducted within stately basilicas, for congregations worshipped while standing. Whereas for the last few centuries Christians of the western traditions have worshipped in pews, which encourage a sense of isolated individuals being spectators or auditors of a service, Byzantine congregations worshipped as a group on their feet. The liturgy was marked by solemn processions, and the generous size of late antique chalices, which sometimes have a capacity of one litre, indicates that large numbers came forward to share in the sacrament of the Eucharist. Religious devotion, which was to become an increasingly private matter in succeeding centuries, was given public and communal expression in sixth-century Constantinople.

Not all the inhabitants of the city were gainfully employed. There were many beggars, and on one occasion the state acted to have people of sound physique not earning a proper living put to work on public works, at the bakeries, in the gardens or elsewhere; those who resisted were to be expelled. Among those who made their way to Constantinople were country people unable to support themselves from the land, perhaps because of the efficient way in which taxes were being collected under Justinian, or because of damage caused by passing armies. The population of the city also included prostitutes, girls who had been lured by promises of shoes and clothing to the capital where they worked for a modest

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income,[7] ambitious clergy who had come to further their careers or causes, and doubtless large numbers of transient sailors; it was believed that speakers of each of the 72 languages thought to be spoken in the world lived in the city. But it would be wrong to think of Constantinople as being similar to a cosmopolitan city of the present day. In the ancient world cities were places of consumption rather than production, funerary inscriptions of the period indicating that the labour force was devoted to providing services rather than producing goods.[8] This was certainly true of Constantinople, and the large fleet which conveyed grain there from Egypt each year can have had little cargo to carry on the return journey. The large numbers of Christian clergy during this period (see below p. 52) is testimony to the spectacular success of one 'service industry' which did not create wealth. More than the inhabitants of modern cities, those of Constantinople had time on their hands. This circumstance may help account for the volatile nature of life in the great city.

In 507 disturbances had broken out when the emperor Anastasius refused to release prisoners. Stones were thrown at him while he sat at the Hippodrome in the kathisma, the imperial box which was entered directly from the palace, and fires were lit which consumed much of the centre of the city. A new prefect of the city was appointed, but he had his hands full when, five years later, rioting broke out over the addition of a few words to the liturgy. The citizens congregated at the Forum of Constantine, threw down the images and statues of Anastasius and cried out for the husband of Juliana Anicia, Areobindus, to be made emperor, but when they came to his home they found that Areobindus had prudently fled. Anastasius resorted to a desperate expedient. He went to the Hippodrome and took his seat in the kathisma without wearing the diadem which proclaimed his office. There he beseeched the people to refrain from rioting, and they, moved

7. Their rate of three folleis per customer (Procopius *Secret History* 17.5) may be compared with the incomes of other workers given by A.H.M. Jones The *Later Roman Empire 284–602* Oxford 1964 pp. 448, 858.
8. While it would be wrong to think that the situation in Constantinople would have been the same as that in a small town, there is food for thought in the discussion of inscriptions at Korykos in Cilicia provided by E. Patlagean *Pauvreté économique et pauvreté social à Byzance* The Hague 1977 pp. 158–69.

by the address of an emperor over eighty years old, asked him to put on the diadem. Other cities around the Mediterranean were not immune from such disturbances. The early years of the sixth century saw rioting in Alexandria, which was famous for its civil disorders, Rome, where people fought in the streets over who should be pope, Ravenna and Antioch. Interestingly the troubles in the latter two cities were linked with anti-Jewish feeling, although it seems unlikely that this was the basic point at issue; rather, Jews seem to have been made scapegoats for problems, hard for modern historians to understand, which were confronting cities at the time. Urban disturbances were certainly a concern for Justinian, several of whose novels seek to guard against the inhabitants of various cities fighting each other.

Civil disturbances were often the work of members of the two great factions of the Hippodrome, the Greens and the less numerous Blues. Originally their function had been to supply items needed for entertainment, and so they employed people such as Theodora's father to look after animals, but as time passed they had increasingly become supporters' clubs. There was bitter rivalry between the factions, which enjoyed some political power. This arose from their function of orchestrating applause at the Hippodrome, where the massed crowds and anonymity of the individuals allowed discontents to become manifest, often in the presence of the emperor. They had powerful backers, for Justinian himself had been a supporter of the Blue faction in his young days, as was Theodora following the bad treatment of her mother by the Greens. But essentially the Greens and Blues were a rowdy lot, who frequently took to vandalism and the lighting of fires after a day at the races. There is no need to see the factions as having represented any particular social, economic or religious interests, nor to see them operating as primitive political parties, although the behaviour of the large crowds which assembled at the Hippodrome could easily assume political significance. They were similar to the fans of soccer teams today, and the descriptions we have of their flamboyant hair-cuts and clothes, which they were thought to have borrowed from barbarians, and their habit of carrying weapons, together with references to the fear their wild behaviour inspired among those who considered themselves respectable citizens, suggest the kinds

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of things we would associate with a youth culture of the twentieth century.

The games held at the Hippodrome on the Ides of January 532 were the occasion for the beginning of the most severe rioting ever experienced in Constantinople.[9] Having failed to obtain the release of some prisoners, the Blues and Greens joined forces. Adopting as their slogan a word familiar in both the races and imperial acclamations, 'Nika' (Victory), they made their way from the Hippodrome to the praetorium of the city prefect, where they seized the prisoners and set fire to the building. Fires spread in the city, the beginnings of a series of conflagrations which, within a few days, were to destroy various buildings in its central part, including the cathedral of Hagia Sophia, the senate house, the Chalke Gate of the palace and the city's most famous bath-house. On 14 January the rioters demanded the dismissal of some of Justinian's key officials. One of them was Eudaimon, the prefect of the city who was the official responsible for the quiet of Constantinople, but the other two were figures of much greater substance.

Not long before a man named John had been appointed praetorian prefect. He had been born at Caesarea in Cappadocia, and his small-town background may account for the animosity he aroused among the scholar bureaucrats who, even then, were a feature of Byzantine life. John created a big impression on his contemporaries, who took delight in professing horror at the sensuality of his life-style. He redesigned the living quarters in the praetorium and caused scandal by having a smart bath installed outdoors; stories were told about the debaucheries in which he indulged, as well as the ambiguity of his religious position. He was an agent in the move away from Latin towards Greek in the administration of the empire. A major switch in this direction had occurred in about 440 when the office of praetorian prefect was held by an Egyptian, Cyrus, some of whose poetry in Greek survives; a century later, conservatives could look back on his tenure of

9. For what follows, our most detailed sources are Procopius *Wars* 1.24, John Malalas 473–76 (*The Chronicle of John Malalas* ed. L. Dindorf, Bonn 1831; trans. E. Jeffreys, M. Jeffreys and Roger Scott Melbourne 1986), and *Chronicon paschale* (ed. L. Dindorf, Bonn 1832; trans. M. Whitby and M. Whitby Liverpool 1989) pp. 114–27.

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the office as marking the beginning of a long decline which was still under way when John cut back the use of Latin in the eastern prefecture.[10]

But the chief reason for John being disliked was quite different. The reign of the emperor Anastasius was remembered as a time of prosperity, and he had died leaving the treasury full. But when Justinian and Theodora came to power it seemed as if the big spenders had taken over and were determined to fritter away the state's wealth. Doubtless some items of heavy expenditure were justified: if Theodora's trip to Pythion had been an exercise in conspicuous consumption and Justinian's consular expenses set new records, the outlay involved in the perpetual peace with Persia, for example, could only have been seen as money well spent. But the government needed money, and John proved himself highly skilled at raising funds. The animosity revealed in our two sources most hostile to him, Procopius and John the Lydian, can be seen as reflecting not merely the contempt of traditionalist scholars, but the financial losses which John's activities on behalf of Justinian may have inflicted on the members of at least one social class.[11]

The third victim of the factions was Tribonian, a Pamphylian who had been much involved in Justinian's legal work. He is named sixth in the list of the commissioners appointed to draw up the Codex in 528, but his work must have been exemplary, for in 529 he was appointed to the office of quaestor, Justinian's first appointee to this key office which gave its holder great access to the emperor, and in the following year was given charge of work on the Digest. Unlike John, Tribonian was a genuine intellectual. As we have seen, the Institutes and Digest were in Latin, the traditional language of Roman law, and John the Cappadocian's partiality for Greek may be a sign of divergence between the two men who may well have been rivals for the ear of the emperor. But in 532 they fell together. In his desperate situation Justinian found the services of John and Tribonian as dispensable as

10. Their cause, however, was a lost one. After the dismissal of John from the office of praetorian prefect in 532 the new appointee, the learned Phocas, was not familiar with Latin.
11. Their data are helpfully summarized in J.R. Martindale *The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire* 3A Cambridge 1992 pp. 627–35.

those of Eudaimon. But the removal from office of unpopular officials was not enough to bring peace to the city. By now people were thinking of the replacement of Justinian as emperor, and their thoughts naturally turned to the family of the well-regarded Anastasius. A crowd went to the house of his nephew Probus, who had been accused of slandering Justinian just a few years earlier, thinking to proclaim him emperor. Not finding him at home, they burned his house down.

Sunday 18 January was to be one of the most eventful days in the history of the city. Early in the morning Justinian appeared in his box in the Hippodrome carrying the Gospels, on which he swore to the assembled crowd that he would not take reprisals. The gesture recalled that of Anastasius in 512. But Justinian received a mixed reception from the people. While some chanted 'May you be victorious!' others cried 'You lie, donkey!' On returning to the palace Justinian told the senators who were there to go to their own homes. They seem to have included the two other nephews of Anastasius, Hypatius and Pompeius, although they may have been asked to leave the preceding evening. A crowd assembled outside the house of Hypatius and took him to the forum of Constantine, where he was proclaimed emperor. Thereafter he was conducted to the Hippodrome, whether or not of his own free will. But when he sat on the kathisma, the seat from which the emperor presided at the games, he could only be seen as acting as an emperor, and an African text explicitly refers to him as having assumed the position of tyrant, the wielder of illegitimate power.[12]

Justinian, closeted in the palace with his closest advisers, discussed what could possibly be done. The situation was desperate: the government had largely lost control of the capital city, and a nephew of a recent popular emperor had come out in open rebellion. According to a passage in Procopius, a rousing speech by Theodora was responsible for stiffening the resolve of the meeting. Arguing against leaving the city, she expressed the hope that she would never be separated from her purple robe and live to see the day when petitioners did not address her as mistress. While it would be possible to take flight across the water, she agreed with the old saying that

12. Victor of Tunnunna *Chron. s.a.* 530 (ed. Th. Mommsen, *Monumenta Germaniae Historica Auctores Autiquissimi* 11).

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'Royalty is a fine burial shroud' (*Wars* 1.24.32–7). It is an excellent story, but unfortunately there are good reasons for not trusting Procopius' account, which cannot be corroborated from any other source. In addition to the general circumstance that no ancient or medieval historian expected accounts of speeches to be taken literally, and the particular one that Procopius was almost certainly not present at the meeting, aspects of the reported speech seem to reflect the author's uneasiness at the power of the empress and the nature of the government, for the concluding quotation is false. The old saying which Theodora is said to have quoted actually runs 'Tyranny is a fine burial shroud'.[13] Rather than attributing the quotation to Theodora, we may find it more plausible to believe that, by altering the first word, Procopius is signalling to alert readers to his unhappiness with Theodora, and perhaps the government of Justinian. We cannot tell, but Justinian decided to resist, and loyal army units were brought into play.

It was not long since Belisarius had returned from the Persian frontier with a large retinue, while Mundus, a barbarian general in Roman service, also happened to be in Constantinople. Justinian ordered Belisarius to enter the Hippodrome through one of the gateways and approach Hypatius through the crowd, a tactic which made heavy civilian casualties inevitable. After Narses, the commander of the eunuch bodyguard, distributed bribes in an attempt to divide the people, Belisarius, Mundus and Narses himself led their troops into the Hippodrome through different entrances and attacked the unarmed populace. A massacre ensued. Contemporaries placed the number of deaths in the tens of thousands. Hypatius and Pompeius were taken captive, and their professions of innocence were not persuasive. One source claims that Justinian was inclined to be merciful to them and that it was the harsher counsels of Theodora that prevailed; be this as it may, they were put to death on the following day, 19 January, and their bodies cast into the sea. Their property, and that of those senators who had supported them, was confiscated. The patricians who had been with them, people whose identity we unfortunately do not know, fled.

13. J. Evans 'The "Nika" rebellion and the empress Theodora' *Byzantion* 54 1984: 380–2.

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Civil unrest on such a scale took contemporaries by surprise, and in seeking to account for it they fell back on a standard explanation: in the punning words of John Malalas (473), it was caused by the activity of demons while Eudaimon was prefect. Writers paraded their disdain for the 'barbarous and merciless mob' involved in the riots in the most overt manner.[14] But their evaluations certainly reflect a tendency, one also found in writings about civil disturbances at other periods, to disparage those involved in crowds, and in any case disturbances over the issue of prisoners were only the beginning of troubles which escalated in two stages.

Firstly, demands were made for the sacking of officials. The wish to see the end of Eudaimon is easy to understand, for as prefect of the city he was responsible for prisoners and so the issue which sparked the riots. The man who replaced him in this office, Tryphon, was the brother of a man who had held it for four previous tenures; doubtless Justinian, no less than Anastasius when faced with a similar situation in 507, felt the need for a steady hand at the wheel. But John the Cappadocian and Tribonian were the two officials most closely associated with the reforms Justinian seemed to be introducing willy-nilly. They were replaced respectively by Phocas, who had been suspected a few years previously of being a pagan, and Basilides, a former colleague of Tribonian on the commission which worked on the Codex in 528/529. They were figures of no particular distinction, neither of whom enjoyed office for long: by the end of the year John had returned to the prefecture, and Tribonian, who did not give up his work on the Digest, had returned to the quaestorship by 535. Demands for the replacement of John and Tribonian expressed discontent with the policies of Justinian.

From this it was only a short step to direct attack on the emperor, and once this reached a certain level it was inevitable that a potential successor would emerge. No-one could have been surprised that it was one of the nephews of Anastasius. It is impossible to tell now whether genuine feeling on the part of the people of Constantinople induced Hypatius to make his fatal grab for power, or whether senatorial money

14. The quote is from John the Lydian *Powers* 3.70; compare Procopius' 'people of the common herd, the whole rabble' (*Buildings* 1.1.20 ed. and trans. H.B. Dewing, London 1914–1940).

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was behind the apparently spontaneous behaviour of the crowd. One of our sources explicitly attributes the riots to the nephews of Anastasius, acting in concert with the many nobles who had sworn to support them and the seditious throng of the people.[15] Whichever it was, Justinian was in a wretched position after the riots. Between him and disaster there had stood just a small group of soldiers, and many of the senators, the very people whose support he had carefully sought by distributing modestly worded diptychs on the occasion of his first consulship, may have been plotting to overthrow him. More than the behaviour of the rioters, that of Hypatius, who had been so trusted that he was still in the palace late in the disturbances, must have hurt. The Nika riots mark a major turning-point in the reign of Justinian.

One member of the senatorial class was of particular importance. Juliana Anicia was of unmatched parentage. Her father, Olybrius, had been a man whose illustrious antecedents reached far back into Roman history and who had briefly been emperor in the West in 472, while her mother, Placidia, had herself been the daughter of the western emperor Valentinian III (425–455). Valentinian's wife Eudoxia had herself been the daughter of the eastern emperor Theodosius II (402–450) and his wife Eudocia, so an inscription could accurately summarize a complex family tree in describing Juliana as inheriting royal blood to the fourth generation. A letter sent to her by pope Hormisdas in 519 drew attention to her imperial blood.[16] Her own husband, Areobindus, was inevitably of less distinguished ancestry, although according to a story current in Rome at the beginning of the sixth century his great grandfather Aspar had been offered the throne by the senate, and it was Areobindus whom discontented elements in Constantinople had sought to make emperor during the riots against Anastasius in 512. But the family was loyal to Anastasius. Indeed, Olybrius, no less than Anastasius' nephews, may have been seen as a potential successor when the old emperor died in 518, but his path to the throne was blocked by the quick action of Justin. In comparison to

15. Marcellinus comes *Chron. s.a.* 532 (ed. Th. Mommsen, *Monumenta Germaniae Historica Auctores Antiquissimi* 11).
16. *Collectio avellana* 179.1 (ed. O. Guenther *Corpus scriptorum ecclesiasticorum Latinorum* 35).

Juliana and her family, Justinian and his wife could only look shabby.

Some of the activities of this remarkable person are known to us. She was well regarded for charitable activities, it being said that when she died she had filled Constantinople with her good works, corresponded with the pope on church affairs, and was responsible for the building or rebuilding of several churches. Among these was a church in honour of the Theotokos at Honoratai, across the Bosphorus from Constantinople, where the citizens seem to have expressed their gratitude by commissioning for her a splendid copy of a Herbal written by a scholar of the first century CE, Dioscorides. The book can still be seen in the National Library in Vienna. The illustrations in the Herbal exploit to the full the wonderful opportunity such texts provided to depict plants, although some would say that the series of illustrated Arabic texts of Dioscorides produced from the tenth century onwards are more pleasing to the eye. The manuscript contains 498 miniatures, and a frontispiece shows a portrait of Juliana herself, sitting between figures representing magnanimity and prudence. She was also responsible for a church dedicated to S Euphemia, where an inscription recorded that her mother Placidia and grandmother Eudoxia had also been involved in work on the church.[17]

But Juliana's most famous work was a church dedicated to the martyr Polyeuktos, erected on a site where her great-grandmother Eudocia had already built a church dedicated to that little-known saint. Thanks to recent work we know far more about this church than would have seemed possible a few decades ago, for its site was uncovered in 1960 when work was under way on the building of a new city hall in what is now Istanbul.[18] Erected within the period 524–527, it was a large church, perhaps the largest in the city at the time of its construction, almost a square with sides of 51.90 and 51.45 metres. The thickness of the foundations of some of the walls make it very likely that it had a dome. As far as can be deduced from fragmentary remains, the apse was decorated with

17. The dedication to this martyr may be significant, for it was in the church dedicated to her that the council of Chalcedon met in 451.
18. There is a convenient summary in Martin Harrison *A Temple for Byzantium* London 1989.

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mosaics depicting figures against a gold background, and there were other mosaics, pieces of carved architectural sculpture, and busts of Christ, the Virgin and Apostles, which must have made the interior of the church dazzling. Its decorations included a remarkable inscription of 41 lines of hexameter verse, in letters eleven centimetres high, parts of which could almost be taken as a challenge to the reigning emperor: 'Who has not heard of Juliana? ... Every land, every city cries out that she made her parents more famous by better works. The inhabitants of the whole earth celebrate in song your ever-memorable toils ... For you alone, I believe, have constructed temples beyond counting throughout the whole earth'.[19] The inscription ended by expressing the wish that the saints to whom Juliana had given presents or in whose honour she had built churches would give their protection to her, her son, and his daughters, and that the glory of the family would last for as long as the sun drove his chariot across the sky.

We have no way of telling what Justinian may have thought of this church, but the family background, intellectual sophistication and private wealth of such a person as Juliana must have grated on an emperor with such lowly origins as his. Moreover, the concluding words of the inscription, which can only have been installed a few years before the Nika riots, contained an uncomfortable reminder that there was at least one great family in the city capable of paying for a massive church, and Olybrius, the son referred to but not named in the inscription, had married Irene, a niece of the popular emperor Anastasius. Indeed, Olybrius, no less than Hypatius and Pompeius, may have been seen as a potential successor when the old emperor died in 518, but any ambitions he had would have been blocked by the prompt action of Justin. Hostility Justinian may have felt towards such people before the Nika riots must have been strengthened by the attempted usurpation of Hypatius. The wife of Pompeius, Anastasia, counted Juliana Anicia among her friends; when the holy man S Sabas had visited the royal city in 511–512 they visited him frequently. But after the events of 532 Hypatius and Pompeius were executed, while Olybrius was sent into exile, from which he was recalled in the following year. In other words, the Nika riots could be seen as having developed from being a

19. *Greek Anthology* 1.10.14–32 (ed. W.R. Paton, London 1931).

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manifestation of popular discontent to a vehicle for the frustrations of an old ruling class which had lost power. Such an interpretation need not have been correct, but it was easy to make, and Justinian was not slow in striking against those who now seemed clearly revealed as his enemies.

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JUSTINIAN THE BUILDER

The devastation of large parts of the monumental centre of Constantinople provided Justinian with a golden opportunity to make his mark on the city. Just as the great fire which devastated Rome in AD 64 had allowed Nero to make his mark on the capital by rebuilding it, so now the way lay open to Justinian in Constantinople. There was still plenty of money in the treasury, and Justinian set to work with a will.

Among the buildings destroyed in the fires was the cathedral church of Hagia Sophia, or Holy Wisdom, a term which designated one of the attributes of Christ (cf. I Cor 1:24). The cathedral dominated the religious life of Constantinople, for it was not only located in the heart of the city but played a role unchallenged by the martyrs' shrines which competed with the cathedral for supremacy in cities such as Rome. Hence the size of its staff, which is known to us from a law of 535 announcing that no further appointments of clergy were to be made until the staff had fallen to 60 priests, 100 male deacons, 40 female deacons, 90 subdeacons, 110 readers, 25 singers, and 100 doorkeepers. Admittedly, these people had to serve the needs of three smaller churches as well as the cathedral, but even so it was hardly a modest establishment. The first cathedral on the site had been dedicated in 360 but had been severely damaged by fire in tumults associated with S John Chrysostom in 404, and it was the restored building, dedicated in 415, that was destroyed in the Nika fires of January 532. Justinian set matters in hand with the decisiveness he so often demonstrated. Two highly competent men, Anthemius of Tralles and Isidore of Miletus, were placed in charge of operations. The former, a member of a well-known family of intellectuals and the author of books on technical subjects, was a man whose talents allowed him to play a practical joke on an enemy: he harnessed steam power which made the apartment in which his victim lived shake so that the man thought an earthquake had occurred and made a

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fool of himself. But Anthemius was known for his ability to 'apply geometrical speculation to material objects' (Agathias 5.6.3, trans. Frendo), while Isidore was the author of a commentary on a work by Hero of Alexandria on vaulting. Yet again, Justinian availed himself of talent from the provinces. With their grasp of theory, Anthemius and Isidore were not the men to design an ordinary building.

Work on the new cathedral began on 23 February. According to a source written a few centuries later, two teams of 5000 workers were employed, and it must have quickly become clear to passers-by that work on a huge building was under way. But it would also have been obvious that the church being erected was of an unusual design. Large churches had traditionally been built in the form of a basilica, a rectangular Roman public building which usually had side aisles, and often a semi-circular apse at the east end. While the design had been developed for secular buildings, it was found very suitable for the purpose of Christian liturgy, so that the cathedral which had been destroyed in the fires, like the major early churches in Rome and elsewhere, had been built along these lines.

Early in the sixth century, however, people were experimenting with other designs. The church of SS Sergius and Bacchus built in Constantinople early in Justinian's reign is octagonal, with a central dome. A similar design was followed at the church of S Vitale in Ravenna, a town in which earlier churches had been designed according to the basilican pattern. We are told work on S Vitale was begun by bishop Ecclesius (521–532), and a mosaic in the apse implies that he was responsible for its construction. Nevertheless the building contains monograms of bishop Victor (537/8–544/5), which suggests that the actual building was carried out during his episcopate, although as we shall see mosaics were installed there a few years after he died. The church of S Polyeuktos which Juliana Anicia had built a few years earlier was nearly square in shape, its sides just under 52 metres long, and seems to have had a dome. The new cathedral of Hagia Sophia can be located against the background of these experiments. It was of ample proportions, being 79 metres in length and 72 metres in width, and hence approaching a square in shape. Four enormous piers supported four arches, of which those on the east and west alarmed people by rising 'above empty

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air', and these supported the mighty dome, 31 metres in diameter, its top 55.6 metres above the ground. The task of raising a dome of this size over what was virtually a square was immensely difficult; indeed, the dome was to collapse in May 558, while further collapses occurred in 989 and 1346. Hence Justinian's decision to entrust the work to a pair of theoreticians rather than to practising architects. Amazed contemporaries thought the church like no other in the world; its golden dome seemed to be suspended from Heaven.[20]

In the late tenth or early eleventh century a new mosaic was installed over an opening into the narthex of the cathedral. It shows an enthroned Virgin holding her Son; to their right is a representation of Justinian presenting them with a replica of Hagia Sophia, while to their left is Constantine offering a replica of the city of Constantinople. Each emperor, then, offers the work for which he was responsible. The image of the church offered by Justinian is extremely distorted: the dome is too large and steep, and the windows at its base too big. But oddly enough the oversized dome and clean lines of the inaccurate representation coincide with what modern people often have in mind when they think of Hagia Sophia; visitors approaching it have been disappointed at the ungainly exterior. But Hagia Sophia was not designed to be seen from the outside.

For contemporaries, the important part of the cathedral was the interior. They particularly admired the quality of light within it. The forty windows at the base of the dome would pick up the rays of the sun from whatever angle they were coming, while a mass of lamps provided light by night. The decor was such as to enhance the light: the ceiling was covered with gold, while surfaces were covered with marble or mosaics, the latter probably non-figurative. The sanctuary was embellished with 40 000 pounds of silver, indicative of a generosity far in excess of that Constantine had displayed when adorning the basilicas of Rome after his conversion, while a large silk hung showing Christ flanked by SS Peter and Paul; it

20. Like no other in the world: Marcellinus comes *Chron. s.a.* 537.5 (singulariter in mundo). Golden dome suspended from heaven: Procopius *Buildings* 1.1.46 (cf. Homer *Il.* 8.19). In a powerfully written passage Procopius writes of the church as soaring, looking down, glorying, dominating and exulting (*Buildings* 1.1.27f; small wonder that the sentence immediately following refers to its pride!).

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shimmered, according to a classicizing poet, with gold, with the rays of rosy-armed dawn.[21] Procopius commented that all the details of the interior produced an extraordinary 'harmony' (συμφωνία, literally 'concord of sound', *Buildings* 1.1.47; he also writes of the harmony of the exterior proportions, 1.1.29). Despite this, he observed that people in the church always found their eyes moving on to other parts (*Buildings* 1.1.39). This has been the experience of many modern visitors to Hagia Sophia, who find it hard to keep their eyes from wandering, and one of the reasons why no photograph of the interior is satisfying, for there is a sense of incompleteness about any part of the whole. Procopius described the sensation produced by the church on the minds of those who entered it to pray: their minds were raised up to God and soared aloft (*Buildings* 1.1.61). But the chief purpose of the building was to provide a setting for the celebration of the Eucharist, in which the emperor would naturally take a prominent part.[22] It is said that a group of Russians who attended a celebration of the liturgy, almost certainly in Hagia Sophia, towards the end of the tenth century, felt that they did not know whether they were in heaven or on earth. Such was the impact of Hagia Sophia.

Given that the cathedral was named for an attribute of Christ, it was fitting that its dedication occurred in the season of Christmas. On 27 December 537 a procession left the church of the martyr S Anastasia, known for its odd practice of having passages of the Bible read in Gothic on feast days, a testimony to generosity it had received at the hands of a barbarian general. Amid throngs of people, Justinian and the patriarch Menas made their way to the new cathedral for a solemn service of dedication. The time which the erection of the new cathedral had taken, no less than the time needed for the completion of the great legal works, indicates the extraordinary speed with which Justinian could complete major

21. Paul the silentiary *Descriptio Sanctae Sophiae* (*Patrologia Graeca* 86) 1.769.
22. Just what part he would play is not clear. The intriguing arguments of Thomas F. Mathews *The Early Churches of Constantinople: Architecture and Liturgy* University Park Penn. 1971, in particular the suggestion that the imperial throne would have been in the central bay of the southern aisle, have not found favour with R.J. Mainstone *Hagia Sophia* New York 1988 pp. 223–6.

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rank beside the Hippodrome as a place of imperial ceremony, he is alleged to have cried out 'Solomon, I have been victorious over you!'

Various other churches were erected by Justinian in the royal city. By 520 he had built SS Peter and Paul, and the church of SS Sergius and Bacchus mentioned above was erected early in his reign. Just over 100 metres north of Hagia Sophia lay the church of Hagia Eirene, Holy Peace, which was also rebuilt after the fires of 532. The large church of the Holy Apostles had emerged unscathed from the Nika riots, but Justinian rebuilt it in the shape of a cross with a dome over the middle. Theodora was said to have laid its foundation stone, and while work was proceeding three coffins, believed to contain the bodies of SS Andrew, Luke and Timothy, were uncovered. The church was dedicated in June 550. A church of similar design was built in Ephesos in honour of S John the Theologian. In Constantinople and its suburbs alone, according to the data provided by Procopius, Justinian built or rebuilt 33 churches. Authors of the time were generous in their attributions, and it would certainly be wrong to credit Justinian with major work on all of these churches, but it is hard to escape the impression of immense activity amid which the new cathedral was only a part.

These, however, were not the only works for which Justinian was responsible in and around his capital. One of the problems the government faced was providing water for the inhabitants of the capital city, which had grown so quickly. The need for drinking water was especially acute during the dry Mediterranean summers, but the lack of storage facilities was also a military handicap, for it meant that the city was vulnerable to enemy attacks on the aqueduct which supplied it. Early in his reign Justinian, following the examples of earlier emperors, saw to the construction of large underground reservoirs which collected the overspill of the aqueduct. The results can be seen by tourists to this day. He also saw to the completion of a public bath which Anastasius had begun.

The efficient deployment of the fleet which carried the grain sent from Egypt to Constantinople was another practical matter to occupy the state's attention. Each August ships bearing what was optimistically known as the 'happy shipment' set out from Alexandria, but sometimes they found it difficult to enter the Hellespont. The waters flowing into the

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Mediterranean from rivers are not enough to compensate for the loss caused by evaporation, and hence at the Dardenelles and the Strait of Gibraltar currents flow in, from the Black Sea and Atlantic Ocean respectively. If the wind was adverse the ships could not make progress against the hostile current. Sometimes they had to lie at anchor and let their cargo rot, yet if the early ships could make good speed to Constantinople they were able to make a second or even a third trip from Egypt before the onset of winter ended the sailing season. The ancient city of Troy had been built close to where the ships sometimes had to bide their time, and from there the island of Tenedos lay not far out to sea. This was the place, according to Vergil's account of the fall of Troy, to which the Greeks retired having left the Trojan Horse outside the walls of the doomed city, and it was there that Justinian saw to the building of an enormous granary. If the winds were contrary, the ships could unload their cargo there and go back to Egypt, leaving other ships to carry it the rest of the way to Constantinople when the winds changed.

Justinian was also an active builder in the most diverse parts of the empire. Following a request from the holy man S Sabas he saw to the completion of the Nea (new) Church in honour of the Theotokos in Jerusalem. Partial excavations conducted in the Jewish quarter of the Old City during recent years have revealed that its northern lateral apse was five metres wide, which suggests that the whole was of vast proportions. In Ephesos, as we have seen, a large church shaped like a cross was built in honour of S John the Evangelist, who was believed to have settled in the town, while in the remote African town of Ceuta, not far from the Strait of Gibraltar, a church was erected in honour of the Theotokos.

Perhaps the most interesting of Justinian's undertakings was in another remote setting. Between the Gulf of Suez and the Gulf of Aqaba lies the desolate Sinai peninsula, towards the south of which stands Mt Sinai, or Gebel Musa, 'Mt Moses', as it is called today. It was there, Byzantines believed, that Moses had two dramatic encounters with God. In the first he saw God in the form of a burning bush and heard him name himself by the mysterious and resonant words 'I am the one who is'. Later, according to the Bible, Moses received the Law there amid thunder and lightning. For centuries the spot had been the site of a Christian cult, and it was there that Justinian

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built a famous church. A surviving inscription on a roof beam, 'For the memory and repose of our late empress Theodora', allows it to be dated to the period of Justinian's reign after 548. It was part of a monastic complex attached to a fort in a remote area, and owed its importance to the religious significance of the site. The dedication of the church to the Theotokos was appropriate, for the Byzantines saw the burning bush as foreshadowing her uncorrupted virginity. A beautiful mosaic in the apse of the church which seems to date from the time of Justinian takes up these biblical themes. It depicts another theophany on a holy mountain, the Transfiguration of Christ. On his right stands Elijah and on his left Moses, while Peter, James and John are below. Around the central scene are portrayals of various noteworthy people from the Bible, with king David holding pride of place in the centre foreground. Clad in a purple chlamys and wearing pearl ear-hangings, he is oddly reminiscent of a portrait of Justinian at S Vitale in Ravenna.

Justinian's patronage here and in many other places was lavish, and such as to impose financial burdens on the state. It made a joke of the claim expressed in the inscription in Hagios Polyeuktos that Juliana Anicia alone had built countless churches throughout the world. Nevertheless, the central work in Justinian's building of churches was Hagia Sophia, and, as we have seen, a later tradition states that when he entered the cathedral for the first time he exclaimed 'Solomon, I have been victorious over you!' It is hard to disentangle the thoughts behind this statement, which may answer to similarities between the First Temple built by Solomon in Jerusalem and Hagia Sophia,[23] but, assuming that it may be genuine, there is almost certainly more to it than meets the eye. Solomon has played a large part in the imagination of later builders. A few years after the death of Justinian a new cathedral at Nantes in Gaul was described as having surpassed the Temple of Solomon, and at the end of the seventh century the caliph 'Abd al-Malik erected the most beautiful building in Jerusalem, the Dome of the Rock, on the site of the Temple, thereby appropriating to the world of Islam some of the significance of the site. The twelve lions in the Court of Lions

23. See the evidence presented by Georg Scheja 'Hagia Sophia und Templum Salomonis' *Istanbuler Mitteilungen* 12 1962: 44–58.

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which was built within the Alhambra at Granada in the fourteenth century stand in some relation to the twelve carved lions which stood by Solomon's Throne (I Kings 10:20, II Chron 9:19), and inscriptions in the Sistine Chapel erected in renaissance Rome compared this edifice with Solomon's Temple. It was therefore entirely reasonable for contemporaries to compare Justinian's achievement to that of Solomon, as did Romanos Melodos in one of his kontakia and Corippus in his panegyric on Justin II. It may also be possible that Justinian's boast of being victorious deliberately echoed the name given to the uprising which had allowed him to build the cathedral, 'Victory' (Nika).[24]

But there may have been more to Justinian's claim than this. Recent work suggests, on the basis of units of measurement and the form of its decoration, that the large church recently built in Constantinople by Juliana Anicia was itself designed in imitation of Solomon's Temple, and an inscription placed in that church boasted of Juliana's having gone beyond the wisdom of Solomon.[25] It would therefore be plausible to see in Justinian's claim of victory over Solomon an indirect claim to have surpassed the work of Juliana. Be this as it may, Juliana stood at the end of a line of private patrons, if indeed she saw herself as a private person. Procopius claims that during Justinian's reign the building and repair of churches throughout the empire could only be undertaken with state funds (*Buildings* 1.8.5). This charge was not true, and Procopius cannot have expected his readers to take it seriously, but it points to a feeling that the building of churches by private individuals could be done away with. In any case, Juliana was the last private patron responsible for the erection of a large

24. On Justinian and Solomon, Romanos Melodos hymn 54.21 (Romanos Melodos trans. Marjorie Carpenter *Kontakia of Romanos, Byzantine Melodist* 1 *On the Person of Christ* Columbia Missouri 1970); the footnotes to the French translation accompanying the edition of J. Grosdidier de Matons *Hymnes* (vol. 5, Paris 1981) bring out the difficulties Romanos found in sustaining a comparison favourable to the emperor. Note as well Romanos' playing with the word 'victory' at 54.16.7, 54.18.8, and Corippus *In Laudem Justini Augusti minoris* 4.283 (ed. and trans. Averil Cameron, London 1976).

25. Harrison, *Temple, Greek Anthology* 1.10.48. Solomon, of course, was famed for his wisdom, and it was Wisdom (Sophia) to which Justinian's church was dedicated.

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church in Constantinople until the last centuries of the Byzantine empire.

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NEW DIRECTIONS

There can be no doubt that the reign of Justinian marked a turning away from the elite. At the end of August 537 a law was issued which stated that the name of the emperor and the year of his reign were to be placed at the beginning of legal documents; only then could dates be supplied in accordance with the methods which had traditionally been used (novel 47). It must be said that the old methods were far from satisfactory. Dating in accordance with the name of the year's consul or consuls involved ambiguity when similarly named consuls held office in different years, as had happened in the West in 501 and 502, and was shortly to become less practical when the office of consul was restricted to the emperor and held intermittently, which meant that most years would have to be given dates according to the number of years which had passed since a particular consulate. Another system involved dating with respect to the position of a year in the indictional cycle of fifteen years, but this meant that after a while it was hard to tell in which cycle a document had been issued. It is odd that the Romans, a practical people in many ways, used such cumbersome methods of dating, and Justinian's reform was obviously sensible. But pride stood behind it as well. The preface to the law announcing the new system, which mentioned Aeneas, Romulus, Numa, Caesar and Augustus, left no doubt as to the company in which Justinian expected to be viewed. The reform was not limited to documents, for in the twelfth year of Justinian's reign, that is the twelve months beginning in April 538, copper coins dated according to Justinian's regnal year were being minted in Constantinople and elsewhere.[26]

One of the main functions of the office of consul was giving one's name to the year, so the reform in dating could be seen as having weakened the standing of that office. Some scholars have held that the consulship was on its last legs by the time of Justinian and that its suppression was timely. In 537 a law

26. M. Hendy *Studies in the Byzantine Monetary Economy c. 300–1450* Cambridge 1985 pp. 539f.

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had made the distribution of consular largesse optional, which could be held to suggest that potential consuls were coming to find the office financially onerous. But the last surviving consular diptych, issued by Justin in 540, depicts slaves energetically performing the gesture of *sparsio*, the scattering of largesse, and people were still coming forward to hold an office which, even under Justinian, could still be described in traditional terms as the mother of the freedom of the Romans. Indeed, there is ample evidence from a slightly earlier period for the office having been keenly sought. The status which came, prior to the reform of 537, from giving one's name to the year, and the popularity to be won from distributing money drawn from one's own wealth so generously that, in the image of a contemporary, it had the appearance of snowflakes,[27] made the office desirable. Of the fifteen years from the accession of Justinian until 541, when the last private holder of the office enjoyed his tenure, there were consuls during eleven, including each of the last four years. This record is more impressive than it may seem, since it had been standard but not invariable practice for one eastern and one western consul to hold office each year; the war in Italy, however, caused a gap in western appointees after 534. Following the consulship of Belisarius in 535 there was no consul for two years; then the office was successively held by John the Cappadocian; by Apion, a member of a prominent Egyptian landowning family; by Justin, a great-nephew of Justinian; and finally by Basilius, a member of a distinguished Roman family which had held many consulships.

John the Cappadocian hardly shone in such company, and his consulship is a reminder that if there were losers in the empire which was emerging under Justinian, there were also winners. As we have seen, John and Tribonian were reinstated not long after their removal from office during the Nika riots. They went on to enjoy their posts for remarkably long tenures: John was praetorian prefect from 531 until 541, with the exception of a period in 532, while Tribonian, having been quaestor from 529 until 532, was to hold the office again from 535 until 542. No comparable tenure for either office is recorded for the fifth or early sixth centuries, and had John and Tribonian not been removed from office by Theodora

27. John the Lydian *Powers* 2.8.

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and, apparently, the plague respectively, they presumably would have continued to hold them indefinitely. As it turned out, their abruptly terminated tenures pale into insignificance beside the heroic career of Peter the Patrician, who was master of the offices for a totally unparalleled period, 539 until 565. At the time of the Nika riots no-one could have foretold the loyalty Justinian would display to those who served him well, but it became clear that Justinian was not only prepared to raise up the talented but would continue to back them.

Perhaps, then, we should see the suppression of the consulate not as a prudent piece of statecraft but as a stage in Justinian's turning away from the senatorial aristocracy, and hence as the culmination of a policy which had been followed steadily for a decade after the Nika riots. In the middle of the century, when an author came to describe the senate house which Justinian had rebuilt after the Nika riots, he commented that it was the place where the senate came together once a year to celebrate a festival.[28] This does not suggest a body of any importance in the affairs of the empire. But after the role senators played in the riots it was hardly likely to have been.

28. Procopius *Buildings* 1.10.7; cf. the description of the senate at *Secret History* 14.8.

1. (*opposite*) A.H.M. Jones *The Later Roman Empire 284–602* Oxford 1964 p. 270. Compare F. Martroye *L'Occident à l'époque byzantine Goths et Vandales* Paris 1904 p. 216; John Julius Norwich *Byzantium the Early Centuries* London 1988 p. 205. It may be worth noting the comment of Tony Honoré that Justinian's historical imagination reached back no more than a century (A.M. Honoré 'Some Constitutions composed by Justinian' *Journal of Roman Studies* 65 1975: 107–23).

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Chapter 3

WARS IN THE WEST

When the first edition of Justinian's Codex was published in 529 the decree which confirmed it opened with the observation that the safety of the state chiefly proceeded from arms and laws. From these, Justinian felt, the state derived its strength. Such a juxtaposition of military and legal activities is common in texts of the period. It occurs in the decree which announced the beginning of work on the Digest in 530, and in the preface to the decree which confirmed that work in 533. Justinian would have agreed with a sentiment Cassiodorus put in the mouth of Theoderic the Ostrogoth: 'It is our purpose to set the provinces the help of God has made subject to us in order by the laws, just as we defend them with arms' (*Variae* 4.12.1). Justinian's endeavors to reform the laws had seen remarkable success, and it was not surprising he turned his attention to war.

The account of the wars provided by Procopius, an eye-witness of many of the scenes he describes, is voluminous. It is also enthusiastic, reflecting the tremendous optimism felt in at least some quarters during the early years of Justinian's reign. The evaluation of the importance of the wars fought in this period which it offers is extremely positive, and in this Procopius has often been followed by modern scholars. But some have gone further, and argued that the wars Justinian launched in Africa and Italy were central aspects of an ideology. Hence, it has been suggested that a 'planned reconquest of the West' was evidence of 'a mission to restore the ancient glories of the empire', and one of the guiding principles of his reign.[1] But as we shall see, the only evidence which can be cited in support of such assertions comes from texts written

after the unexpected early success against the Vandals. Here, as elsewhere, some of the main themes of Justinian's reign developed as the years passed.

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WAR IN AFRICA

Among the barbarian states which emerged in the West during the fifth century, the kingdom established by the Vandals following their crossing from Spain into Africa in 429 was in a most important area. Not only had Africa traditionally been a major exporter of grain and olive oil within the Roman empire, but a trade in pottery which had developed from the end of the second century had ensured its prosperity in the generally depressed economy of the later Roman West. Towards the end of the fourth century a Roman author, with some exaggeration, represented the capital of Africa, Carthage, as the third city of the empire. But Africa was not merely wealthy. The intellectual powerhouse of early western Christianity, it produced an unending stream of combative theologians. Taken over in the years following 429 more or less *en bloc* by a barbarian people who quickly developed an unnerving naval capacity, to which a devastating assault upon Rome in 455 bore witness, Africa retained an important role in Mediterranean affairs. The plunder taken from Rome in 455 included Eudocia, the daughter of the emperor Valentinian III; she subsequently married Geiseric's son Huneric. Such was the reputation of the Vandals that when a Gothic chieftain came to an agreement with the emperor in the early 470s he specified that he would fight against any of the enemies of the empire except them!

But Vandal Africa was notorious for another reason. One of the major early Christian heresies was Arianism, a form of belief which asserted that the Son was not of the same substance as God the Father, not having existed from eternity but having been created by the Father in time. This belief was condemned by the Council of Nicaea in 325, and the wording of many passages in the so-called Nicene Creed, sung to this day in Christian churches, was designed to exclude Arian understandings. By the sixth century Arianism had become extinct among the Romans, but by then many of the barbarians who had gained power in the West had come to accept its teachings. It is hard to establish how committed its initial

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barbarian adherents, and other barbarians later converted through them, were to its theology, and it may be that the appeal of Arianism to them lay simply in its being a form of Christianity distinct from that of the Romans, who by this time were overwhelmingly Catholics.

Needless to say, Catholics living in a state ruled by Arians need not have found life unpleasant; Ostrogothic Italy, for example, is attractive for the religious tolerance which its Arian government practised. But this was not the experience of Africa under the Vandals. A savage persecution, which owed something to the wish of the Vandal state to gain control over the assets of the church and its members, took place. On the other hand, the polemical traditions of African Christianity ensured a lively response to the hostile activity of the new rulers. Already under the reign of Geiseric (428–477) there were outbreaks of persecution, but conditions markedly worsened under his successor Huneric (477–484), who ordered that all the Catholics of his kingdom were to become Arians. Some obeyed, but the hold of Catholicism was too strong to be broken.

During times of persecution, the Catholics of Africa took comfort from remembering that they were adherents of a faith which had spread throughout the known world. Surely, they felt, they could expect sympathy from their co-religionists. A veritable diaspora of African clergy and dispossessed members of the landowning class scattered around the Mediterranean, visible evidence of the malignity of the Vandals, while stories of their atrocities circulated widely. The story of the townspeople of Tipasa who could still speak after a Vandal official cut their tongues out was well known, and was recorded in five Byzantine sources. Indeed, a dramatic account of the persecution written in the 480s by Victor of Vita may well have been read in Constantinople. Given that people were coming to see the emperor as the protector of orthodox Christians, wherever they might be, it is possible to see persecution by the Vandals as playing into the hands of their potential enemies in Constantinople.

The imperial government had continued to keep an eye on the affairs of Africa, despite its having concluded a treaty recognizing the Vandal control of its wealthiest parts in 440. In 468 an expedition was sent from Constantinople at great expense against the Vandals, but it came to nothing. Attempts which were made to ameliorate the condition of the Catholics of Africa were similarly to no avail. Nevertheless, as time

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passed relations between the Vandals and Constantinople became less cool. King Thrasamund (496–523) was described as a 'friend' of the emperor Anastasius, while his successor Hilderic (523–530) had visited Justinian in Constantinople; one wonders whether he called on his cousin Juliana Anicia in the city. On coming to power Hilderic was quick to recall the exiled bishops and open the Catholic churches. But he was not universally popular among the Vandals, and after a military defeat in 530 he was deposed and replaced as king by his cousin Gelimer. From his imprisonment Hilderic appealed to Justinian for help, and in 533 his ally struck.

As it happened, Justinian found himself in a good position to make war on Gelimer, having concluded his perpetual peace with Persia in 532.[2] But when Justinian broached the plan with his advisers their response was not positive. Procopius represents John the Cappadocian as having given a strong speech advising against making war, but states that a vision from a bishop which conveyed a promise of divine aid encouraged Justinian to persevere (*Wars* 3.10.1–21). At the very least there is a degree of artifice in Procopius' account, which may have been constructed so as to give the emperor sole credit for the launching of a war the successful outcome of which was known to the author. But we may accept that the decision to invade Africa was Justinian's, and the story of a vision receives some indirect confirmation from an African source which states that he had a vision of Laetus, a bishop who had been committed to the flames under Huneric. As so often, Justinian leaped where others feared to tread.

A fleet was prepared, and at about the summer solstice in 533, after prayers had been offered by Epiphanius, the patriarch of Constantinople, it set sail. On board was a youth who had recently been baptized and become the adopted son of Belisarius and his wife, Antonina; later it was believed that Antonina and the young man had a long-running affair. Belisarius had under him a force of 10 000 infantry, 5000 cavalry, and a following of barbarian troops. Great authority was invested in the commander of the expedition, for Jus-

2. The language John uses when mentioning this (*Powers* 3.28, ed. A.C. Bandy *On Powers* Philadelphia 1983 p. 176.24f) is reminiscent of Procopius *Wars* 1.1.1 (ed. and trans. H.B. Dewing, London 1914–1940), itself reminiscent of Thucydides (above p. 2).

tinian gave Belisarius a document granting him the power of the emperor (Procopius *Wars* 3.11.20). Our source uses the noun βασιλεύς, which can mean 'king' as well as 'emperor', but in the context in which it occurs here it clearly means that at this stage in their relationship Justinian was prepared to grant Belisarius authority to act in his stead while on a major campaign far from home.

Good progress was made. A problem arose when the biscuits provided for the soldiers went bad, a consequence of what Procopius represents as an ill-advised cost-cutting strategy on the part of the praetorian prefect, John the Cappadocian, who had arranged for the dough to be baked over the fires of a public bath-house. Having crossed the Aegean Sea and rounded the Peloponnesos the fleet took on water at Zakinthos before crossing the Adriatic. The army now proceeded with a feeling of trepidation; a story was told of how Geiseric had once enslaved 500 of the leading men of Zakinthos, and then chopped them into pieces which he threw into the Adriatic. But there was no opposition as the fleet made its way to Sicily where, thanks to an agreement which had been concluded with the Gothic government of Italy, it landed near Mt Etna. Here Belisarius received some reassuring news: Gelimer, unaware of the approaching force, had sent the bulk of his army to put down a rebellion in Sardinia which had been encouraged by Justinian, and was himself some distance inland from Carthage. So the order was given to sail to Africa. Proceeding by way of Malta, the invading force made land at Caput Vada, the modern Ras Kaboudia in Tunisia.

Now a decision had to be taken. There were two possible ways by which the invaders could approach Carthage, the capital: the army could continue to sail or it could disembark and march overland. It was decided to disembark, and the army commenced its march, following the coast northwards as the fleet accompanied it offshore. The soldiers encountered only friendship from the native Africans. Gelimer, on learning of his imminent danger, ordered the execution of Hilderic, whom he had kept in prison, and prepared to resist. When the vanguard of the invading army reached Decimum, about 15 kilometres from Carthage, it defeated a Vandal detachment; the ferocious appearance of a small invading force of Massagetes was alone enough to drive away another group of Vandal warriors; and finally the main Vandal

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force under Gelimer was routed. The Africans noted that the day on which this occurred, 14 September, was the day of the festival of the martyr Cyprian, a former bishop of Carthage. The city lay open to the invaders, and on the next day Belisarius led his army in. Entering the palace he sat down on Gelimer's throne and ate for his lunch food which had already been prepared for the Vandal king. Procopius' description of the scene is curious, and of a kind to suggest doubt as to Belisarius' precise status, for he observes that 'palace' is the word used by the Romans for where the emperor lives, and that the place where Belisarius had his lunch, the 'delphix', took its name from imperial ceremonial at Rome (*Wars* 3.21.2–4). The soldiers, for their part, exercised what seemed amazing restraint and bought their lunch in the forum.

Meanwhile, Gelimer had fled westwards with his forces and recalled the troops which he had earlier sent to Sardinia. So it was that in mid-December the two armies encountered each other at Tricamarum, not far from Carthage. Before long the Vandals were put to flight, falling back as far as the camp where the women and children were taking shelter, but when Belisarius advanced towards it with his forces Gelimer leaped on his horse and rode away. Having eluded his pursuers he took refuge amid the Moors on a mountain in Numidia, where he displayed a taste for the melodramatic. He asked the officer Belisarius had appointed to guard the mountain for a lyre, a loaf of bread and a sponge: the lyre so that he could accompany himself singing an ode he had composed on his misfortune, the loaf because he had not been able to eat bread on the mountain, and the sponge because of a swelling in an eye which he had not been able to wash. After some months in his lofty refuge he gave himself up, and was taken to Carthage a captive. Belisarius had already gained control of Sardinia, Corsica, the Balearic Islands, and Septem (the modern Ceuta), a fortress near the Strait of Gibraltar, but had not been able to persuade the Goths to relinquish a fortified site in Sicily which the Vandals had held.

Belisarius' achievement in overthrowing the mighty state of the Vandals within a few months was stunning; Procopius was not sure whether deeds of that kind had ever occurred before (*Wars* 4.7.20). The early part of his first book dealing with the Vandal war depicts many of the preceding Roman emperors as a collection of remarkable incompetents, of whom even the

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best had failed to resolve the situation in Africa, but now the tables had been turned. News of the defeat of the Vandals was received with joy in Constantinople. The preface to the Institutes, published in November 533, exultantly refers to the return of Africa and countless other provinces to Roman power and the rule of Justinian, while a constitution published in the following year concerning the government of Africa, one of the few items of legislation published in the name of Justinian which seems to have been written by the emperor himself rather than the chancery, began: 'The mind cannot conceive nor the tongue express what thanks and praise we should show forth to our Lord and God Jesus Christ'. It goes on to give full voice to the optimism of the period: 'Africa, which was taken captive a hundred and five years ago by the Vandals, those enemies of souls and bodies, has regained its freedom through us'. After listing some of the excesses of the Vandals, Justinian continues: 'By what work or deeds can I thank God who has seen fit to avenge the wrongs of his church and pluck the people of mighty provinces from the yoke of servitude through me, the least of his servants?'[3] The mood in Constantinople was buoyant, and at some time during the mid-530s a medallion was issued showing on its reverse the emperor on horseback, nimbed and holding a spear, following a winged Victory.

But Justinian had to depend on informants for news from the theatre of war. Whereas his Persian counterpart Khusrau led armies into the field, it was decades since a Roman emperor had commanded his troops, and only the grossest flattery could lead to Justinian being described as a general.[4] Justinian's ignorance of developments far from home created a situation which the unscrupulous sought to exploit more than once. Before long it was whispered that Belisarius was

3. Codex 1.27.1. Apart from the claim that the Vandals turned churches into stables, the list of Vandal atrocities could have been written by someone with access to the *History of the Vandal Persecution* written by Victor of Vita (trans. John Moorhead, Liverpool 1992); cf. R. Bonini 'Caduta e riconquista dell' impero romano d'occidente nelle fonti legislative giustinianee' *Felix Ravenna* 111f 1976: 293–318 at 304. Stables were not mentioned by Victor, but such activities were known to Procopius: *Wars* 3.8.20, 23. On the authorship of Codex 1.27, Honoré 'Some Constitutions'.

4. As was the case in *Greek Anthology* (ed. W.R. Paton, London 1931) 1.97.4, 1.98.2.

planning to set up an independent government in Africa. When he was given the choice of returning to Constantinople with Gelimer and the leading Vandals, or staying in Africa and sending captives, the general wisely chose the former, and on his return to Constantinople Belisarius took part in ceremonial acts which made his subordination to Justinian explicit. He made his way from his own house to the Hippodrome on foot, and there advanced to the throne on which Justinian was sitting. He and Gelimer, the latter stripped of his purple garment, fell to the ground before it. No less than the defeated king, Belisarius, as he performed the rite of proskynesis, made it clear that he was a suppliant of the emperor. A Persian ambassador was looking on.

One hundred years of Vandal rule had come to a sudden end, and there was a need to reintegrate Africa into the empire. In April 534 Justinian issued detailed legislation concerning its administration. A praetorian prefect was appointed to head the civil administration. There were to be 396 officials working under the prefect and another 350 working under his subordinates; with a thoroughness typical of much of Justinian's legislation, the salary payable to each was itemized. The post was a new one. In earlier days Africa had fallen under the oversight of the praetorian prefect of Italy and Africa, based in Italy, but this ceased to be so when the Vandals took Africa. Now, however, Justinian created an African prefecture, distinct from the prefecture of Italy, an office which the Goths had maintained in Ravenna. Its first holder was an experienced administrator who had already held prefectures in Illyricum and the East. The chief holders of power in Byzantine Africa were therefore a Greek-speaking general and a Greek-speaking bureaucrat.

But all was not to be plain sailing. Despite their reputation for ferocity, the Vandals had not been able to defend their territory from enemies in the interior of Africa, and their last decades had been marked by defeats at the hands of the Moors, also known as Berbers, indigenous transhumant people who lived in a symbiotic but inevitably awkward relationship with the settled farmers and townspeople. Indeed, the absence of Gelimer when Belisarius landed seems to have been due to his fighting the Moors. They saw in the collapse of the Vandals a chance to make further gains. Solomon, a eunuch from Mesopotamia, was given the task of dealing with

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the unanticipated threat they posed. He took resolute action against them in the field and set under way a campaign to erect defensive works; some of the massive fortifications erected in Africa during the reign of Justinian can still be seen.[5] But progress was held up by a major revolt of the army which broke out in 536. Some of the troops had married Vandal women and stood to lose by the confiscation of the lands the Vandals had taken over. Justinian dealt with the problem by recalling the general and replacing him with a relative, Germanus. The efforts of the new general met with success, and in 539 Solomon was sent back to Africa.

The two postings of Solomon to Africa, however, had an unusual feature, for in 534 and again in 539 he combined the functions of praetorian prefect and of the commander-in-chief, magister militum. This flew in the face of standard practice in the later Roman empire, where the civil and military arms of the state had functioned independently of each other for centuries. It is easy to see how the special circumstances of Africa could be thought to have called for an amalgamation of the offices. Nevertheless, the unusual concentration of powers enjoyed by Solomon proved to be a straw in the wind.

The general who emerged with most credit from the war against the Vandals, however, was a man whose career had hitherto not been impressive. Belisarius, appointed consul for 535 in succession to Justinian himself, used some of the spoils won from the Vandals as largesse. But it was an even greater success for his master. The throne from which Justinian received the proskynesis of a powerful and hostile king and of a general who had been accused of plotting against him was the very one which Hypatius had occupied in state during the Nika riots, scarcely two years previously. Belisarius had brought to Constantinople the enormous treasure of the Vandals, enriched by the plunder Geiseric had taken from Rome in 455. Among these items were some of the treasures of the Jews which Titus had removed from where king Solomon had placed them in Jerusalem; these Justinian sent to

5. E.M. Ruprechtsberger 'Byzantinische Befestigungen in Algerien und Tunisien' *Antike Welt* 20 1989: 3–21 is a beautifully illustrated discussion. See in general D. Pringle *The Defences of Byzantine Africa from Justinian to the Arab Conquest* Oxford 1981.

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churches in that city. Gelimer was given estates in Galatia, an inland area of Asia Minor where he could do no harm, and Justinian began to contemplate the future. Astonishingly fortunate in his African gamble, he looked further afield.

The widening of his ambitions can be seen in the titles which were applied to him in official documents. In November 533 a law was issued with a new intitulature, in which Justinian was described as 'Alammanicus, Gothicus, Francicus, Germanicus, Anticus, Alanicus, Vandalicus, Africanus'.[6] The title 'Anticus' relates to successes against barbarian enemies in Thrace in the period 530–533, while the following three all refer to Belisarius' success against the Vandals and their Alan comrades, which was conventionally attributed to the emperor. The first four words, on the other hand, represent a revival of traditional terms. Yet they had a contemporary resonance, for the Alammani, Goths, Franks and 'Germans', a general term which included Franks, had made themselves at home on formerly Roman territory no less than the Antai, Alans and Vandals. A law issued in the spring of 535 is evidence for Justinian looking further afield, for it expresses the hope that, Africa having been regained and the Vandals reduced to slavery, Justinian would be able to undertake many still greater projects, with the help of God (novel 8.10.2). From Africa, the obvious direction to move was northwards. And so it was that, in the words of a contemporary chronicler: 'After Carthage and Libya with its king Gelimer had been made subject, the emperor gave thought to Rome and Italy'.[7]

. . .

WAR IN ITALY

At its closest the African coastline is 150 kilometres from Sicily, and at some stage Justinian conceived the plan of launching a follow-up expedition against Italy. As Africa had been, Italy was under the control of a barbarian government, that of the Ostrogoths, but their government was utterly unlike that of the Vandals. Whereas the Vandals had invaded part of the empire as its enemies, the Ostrogoths under king Theoderic

6. See on this G. Rösch ΟΝΟΜΑ ΒΑΣΙΛΕΙΑΣ Vienna 1978 pp. 101–3.
7. Marcellinus comes *Chron. s.a.* 535.1 (ed. Th. Mommsen, *Monumenta Germaniae Historica Auctores Antiquissimi* 11).

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had been sent to Italy in 488 by the emperor Zeno to overthrow the rule of Odovacer, holder of power since he deposed the last Roman emperor in the West in 476; whereas the Vandals had simply helped themselves to the possessions of the inhabitants of Africa, the Ostrogoths were supported in accordance with a traditional Roman mechanism which may well not have involved the transfer of property;[8] whereas the Vandals were notorious for religious persecution, the Ostrogoths, no less Arians, respected the Catholic church. Much of the credit for their benign ways belongs to king Theoderic, who held power in Italy from the defeat of Odovacer in 493 until his death in 526, and who was remembered for good by both Goths and Romans. It was clear that any rationale provided for war against the Ostrogoths would have to be different from that supplied for war against the Vandals.

Such a rationale was forthcoming. If an invasion of Africa could be justified by the appalling conduct of the Vandals towards local people, the Goths were vulnerable because of their constitutional position. It was agreed by all that Theoderic had led them to Italy in accordance with a commission from Zeno to overthrow Odovacer's 'tyranny', a word which had the sense of 'illegitimate government'. But the status of the government Theoderic established on the ruins of that of Odovacer, which preserved Roman ways but was to all intents and purposes independent of Constantinople, was vague. Was it the case that Italy under the Goths enjoyed 'libertas', that freedom which especially pertained to Romans, or did it not? In a letter to Justinian nominally written on behalf of the senate of Rome, but which reflected the thinking of the Gothic government, Cassiodorus could assert in 535 that, if Africa had deserved to regain its freedom, it would be cruel for Italy to lose what it had always been seen to possess (*Variae* 11.13.5). Yet, scarcely ten years previously, an allegation that he had sought 'Roman freedom' was one of the charges the enemies of the philosopher Boethius made against him before Theoderic. Not persecution, then, but an alleged lack of freedom, with the broader implication of illegitimacy, was the weakness in the Ostrogothic state which Byzantine propaganda sought to exploit.

The issue was academic for most of the reign of the great

8. Walter Goffart *Barbarians and Romans* Princeton NJ 1980.

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Theoderic. Towards its end various senators had been accused of corresponding with the empire in a way disloyal to the Gothic government, and suspicions of treason brought about the execution of Boethius. But there is no need to believe that any correspondence which took place was disloyal, nor that the senators were in any way set up by Constantinople.[9] Nevertheless, the years after 526 were not easy for the Ostrogothic state. Theoderic's son-in-law Eutharic, whom he had hoped would succeed him and who had been accepted by Justin as his son-in-arms, predeceased him, and the succession passed to a boy, Athalaric, a grandson of the great king. Effective power, however, was wielded by the boy's mother, Amalasuintha. A letter was sent to the emperor Justin in the name of the new king seeking peace and friendship which, by using the phrase 'let hatreds be put away together with those who have been buried' (Cassiodorus *Variae* 8.1.2), tactfully suggested that the tensions which had disfigured the last years of Theoderic's reign be put away.

Coming to power in 527, Justinian had to deal with a state in Italy which was still formidable. Trouble between Gothic and Roman soldiers had broken out more than once during the reign of Theoderic, and the Goths continued to cause difficulties after his death. A letter written in 533 rejoiced that, contrary to what 'the ruler of the East' wanted, Amalasuintha had made the Danube Roman; indeed, given that the emperor kept sending embassies to Italy, it was clearly the case that 'her unique power has caused the awesome loftiness of the East to bend down, so that it elevates the Italian lords' (Cassiodorus *Variae* 11.1.11). Such words could not have been to Justinian's taste, but they could not disguise the shaky nature of Amalasuintha's power. Tensions among the Goths which had remained latent during the powerful rule of Theoderic now came into the open, finding expression in controversy over how Athalaric was to be educated. At one time Amalasuintha found her position so threatened that she arranged with Justinian to live as an exile in Constantinople, an arrangement which would have given the emperor the ability to have intervened forcefully in Italian affairs. But the

9. Henry Chadwick *Boethius the Consolations of Music, Logic, Theology and Philosophy* Oxford 1981 pp. 66–8 seems to me to place too dark an interpretation on Byzantine policy.

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resourceful regent succeeded in arranging to have three of her enemies murdered and decided to remain in Italy.

Amalasuintha, however, was not the only relation of Theoderic on the stage. The accession of Athalaric in 526 had entailed the exclusion of another potential successor, Theoderic's nephew Theodahad, a wealthy landowner who owned great estates in Tuscany. Annoyed at the treatment he received from Amalasuintha, he made contact with bishops Justinian had sent with the overt purpose of discussing theology with the pope, and asked them to tell the emperor he was prepared to hand over Tuscany to him, in exchange for a large sum of money, the rank of senator and freedom to live in Constantinople. Meanwhile Amalasuintha, concerned at the deteriorating health of her son and plots which were being mounted against her, was herself entering into further negotiations with Justinian, and she agreed with a senator who was accompanying the bishops that she would place all Italy in the hands of the emperor. Justinian, having received these proposals from the ruler of Italy and her chief enemy, was in a strong position.

For some time, he had being showing ominous signs of wanting to intervene in Italian affairs. In 530 he had promulgated a law on ecclesiastical affairs which would apply to Rome as well as Constantinople and the rest of the Christian world, and a passage in the introduction to the Digest (533) which orders that copies of his legal works were to be transmitted to students in 'the royal cities' as well as Beirut implies that he expected his legislative work to be observed in Italy as well as the territories under his direct control (constitution *omnem* 7).[10] After Gelimer's assumption of power in Africa in 530, Justinian sent a message to Italy warning Athalaric's government not to recognize the usurper, and apparently the Goths did as he wished. In 534 a law was issued addressed to the senate of Constantinople and of Rome (Codex 6.51), while in the following year another was promulgated concerning the possessions of the Roman church (novel 9), and Justinian wrote to Theodahad on behalf of a monastery which was paying too much tax and a Gothic woman who had in some

10. But the constitution goes on to forbid students in 'this most splendid city' (Constantinople) and Beirut, but not those in Rome, to play tricks on their teachers (9f). Perhaps Justinian felt that the students of Rome were better behaved.

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way been made to suffer for converting to Catholicism. It would be interesting to know how Justinian came to know of these matters, but the Gothic government can hardly have been pleased to have the emperor intervene in such trivial things. The apparent failure of the Gothic government to publish the name of the eastern consul for 534, Justinian himself, may be a sign of increasing tension between Ravenna and Constantinople.

On 2 October 534 Athalaric died, whereupon his mother, now queen, attempted to strengthen her position by associating Theodahad with her on the throne. The move was not wise. Letters were sent by both Amalasuintha and Theodahad to Justinian explaining the turn of events and asking for his friendship, and before long Amalasuintha wrote a letter to Theodora assuring her of her love and asking for news. Before long, however, Theodahad imprisoned the queen on an island in Lake Bolsena. The murky situation was one which Roman diplomacy could turn to its own ends, especially when one of the ambassadors Theodahad sent to Justinian to explain his actions failed to conceal his bad behaviour. This was the patrician Liberius, who had been in the service of the Goths for four decades, and that he chose not to return to Italy can be taken as a straw in the wind. Shortly afterwards, probably at the end of April 535, Amalasuintha was murdered on Theodahad's orders. People believed she had been strangled in a bath-house. It was not a good time to murder a woman who had been the friend of Justinian, and the situation was taken advantage of by the emperor's ambassador, a young intellectual from Mesopotamia named Peter who, like so many of those found working for Justinian in the early years of his reign, would grow old in his service. Peter threatened Theodahad with a war admitting of no truce.

Justinian was extraordinarily optimistic, and expressed hopes beyond those he had entertained at the time of the Vandal war. The disintegration of the Gothic government had occurred at precisely the time when, thanks to the outcome of the Vandal war, he was free to exploit it. In 535 he launched a two-pronged attack against the Goths. While Mundus, the commander-in-chief in Illyricum, led a force to Dalmatia, where he was soon to be killed in battle, Belisarius sailed to Sicily with 7000 regular, allied barbarian and Isaurian troops, and small detachments of Huns and Moors. In other words,

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he had at his disposal something like half the troops he had commanded in Africa. But fortune smiled on him. Having landed at Catania he proceeded to occupy the towns of the island, encountering resistance only at Palermo. On the last day of the year, which was also the last day of his consulate, he marched into Siracusa and distributed largesse.

Theodahad's responses were futile. He continued to negotiate with Justinian's ambassador Peter, at one point intimating that he was prepared to resign his office.[11] A Gothic force was sent to Rome, to the disquiet of the senate, and a series of letters written in the names of the king and his wife were sent to Justinian and Theodora, seeking peace and concord. Somewhat later, pope Agapetus was dispatched to Constantinople to plead the cause of the Goths. Relations between the Roman church and Justinian were at that moment cool, for an imperial pronouncement that the bishop of the new city of Justiniana Prima was to enjoy the rank of metropolitan and archbishop had elicited from the pope a guarded response in November 535. But the pope had his own agenda. Two emissaries of the patriarch of Antioch, a doctor and an architect, had recently arrived in Rome with news of the growing power of the Monophysite heretics, and following his arrival in Constantinople in late February or March 536 Agapetus busied himself in church affairs but achieved nothing to the benefit of the Goths.

Following the capture of Sicily the mood in Constantinople was more buoyant than ever. During the spring of 536 Justinian issued a law expressing the hope that God would allow him to reconquer the lands formerly held by the Romans which had been lost by indolence; God had allowed Justinian to come into the possession of all Africa and Sicily, and to have good hope that he would allow him to take back other lands as far as the two shores of the Ocean which the old Romans had held; trusting in the help of God, the emperor was hastening to change things for the better.[12] At about the same

11. Negotiations which preceded this offer are discussed by E.K. Chrysos 'Die Amaler-Herrschaft in Italien und das Imperium Romanum: Der Vertragswentwurf des Jahres 535' *Byzantion* 55 1981: 430–74.
12. Novel 30.11.2; compare on indolence John the Lydian *Powers* 218.2,7, 108.2,22. Neglectfulness is a characteristic of the Romans which emerges from the scornful introductory pages of Procopius *Wars* 3, where their leaders are portrayed as buffoons whose follies are effortlessly exploited by the barbarians.

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time Belisarius crossed to the mainland of Italy and marched northwards. He met with no resistance until he reached Naples, where there was a Gothic garrison. Here the inhabitants asked him not to proceed with an attack on their town, but Belisarius is represented by Procopius as having recommended that they choose freedom rather than slavery. Of course there is no reason to suppose that Belisarius said precisely these things, but at the very least it is interesting that when Procopius wrote these words the justification for the war could be so expressed. His advice was not followed, and only after a siege of about three weeks was the town taken by storm. It was the first victory of this kind in the war, and the troops behaved wildly. They were said to have killed thousands while sacking the city, with priests and consecrated religious among their victims. The Massagetes, the mere sight of whom had earlier been enough to terrify Vandals, were to the fore.[13]

Theodahad remained impassive in the face of these losses. One of the prime functions of a barbarian king was that of providing leadership in war, and the Goths were quick to turn against a monarch who showed himself so incompetent. Meeting at a site near Terracina, roughly midway between Rome and Naples, the Gothic warriors who were in that part of Italy elected as their new king Vitigis, a man of military experience who was the first Ostrogothic sovereign in Italy not to have been a member of the Amal family. Theodahad, who had been in Rome, left the city for Ravenna, but was overtaken on the road and murdered in December 536. Vitigis sent ambassadors to Constantinople to plead for peace. They took with them letters written by Cassiodorus addressed to Justinian and the master of the offices, affirming that the murder of Theodahad was a good deed.[14] But it was far too late for such

13. The account of the sacking in the *Liber Pontificalis* (trans. R. Davis, *The Book of Pontiffs (Liber pontificalis)*. Liverpool 1989 p. 54) paints a grimmer picture than Procopius (*Wars* 5.10.26–37), but the sources are not contradictory. Note too the laconic words of Marcellinus comes: 'Neapolim vastat' (*Chron. s.a.* 536.3).
14. Cassiodorus *Variae* 10.32f (ed. Th. Mommsen, *Monumenta Germaniae Historica Auctores Autiquissimi* 12; trans. S.J.B. Barnish, Liverpool 1992). A phrase towards the end of the second letter, in which Cassiodorus urges that hatred should be buried with the death of a sinner (10.33.3) is remarkably similar to a phrase the same author had used a decade earlier writing to Justin on the death of Theoderic: 'hatreds should be closed up with tombs' (*Variae* 8.1.2).

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measures, and the new king was soon to follow in the footsteps of his predecessor and take the road to Ravenna.

Vitigis can be criticized for his retreat, which effectively abandoned much of Italy to the invaders, but it may have been dictated by fear of the Franks. During the reign of Clovis (*c.* 481–511) this people, advancing from the northwest, had made rapid progress into Gaul. Having rejected the attempts of Theoderic to make peace between himself and the Visigoths, Clovis had gone on to defeat them at the battle of Vouillé in 507. The Franks had a tradition of alliance with Constantinople, and after the battle of Vouillé the emperor Anastasius showed his pleasure by conferring on Clovis an honorary consulship.[15] Following the death of Theoderic the Franks had shown themselves interested in making gains which threatened the Ostrogoths, and they would clearly be in a position to influence the outcome of a major war fought in Italy. Hence the Roman invaders and the Gothic defenders both sought the support, or at least the benevolent neutrality, of the Franks. At the beginning of the war they had promised Belisarius that they would fight as his allies, but in 536 Theodahad, in return for a promise of help, had agreed to give them a part of Gaul which the Ostrogoths had gained under Theoderic and a large sum of gold. On coming to power Vitigis carried out the Gothic side of the bargain, and received an agreement from the Franks to send non-Frankish troops to assist him. Nevertheless, caution was called for whenever the Franks were involved, and the move to Ravenna may have been an attempt to cover his rear.

But it played into the hand of Belisarius. The central parts of Italy were left dangerously exposed, and the inhabitants of Rome were emboldened to invite the invaders to occupy their city. On 9 December 536, as its Gothic garrison left northwards through the Flaminian Gate, the army of Belisarius entered the city from the south through the Asinarian Gate. It was a happy day, the significance of which Procopius emphasized by the solemnity of its dating: Rome became subject to Romans again after an interval of sixty years, on the ninth day of

15. Gregory of Tours *Historiarum libri X* ed. W. Arnolt, B. Krusch, W. Levison (*Monumenta Germaniae Historica Scriptores Rerum Meroringicarum* 1/1), trans. as *History of the Franks* (O. M. Dalton, Oxford 1927; L. Thorpe, Harmondsworth 1974), 2.38.

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the month called by the Romans 'December', in the eleventh year of Justinian's reign.[16] When news of the loss of Rome came to Vitigis he prepared a host which his enemies believed numbered 150 000 and advanced on the city. Making no attempt to take various towns which the invaders had captured, he arrived at Rome towards the end of February. But the city, surrounded by walls which were for the most part in sound condition, would have defied an army more competent at siege warfare than that of the Goths. They could only surround about half of it, and Vitigis, despite some successes, was unable to gain a decisive edge. Nevertheless, there were only 5000 troops available to defend the city, so neither side was able to bring about a speedy victory. In the spring of 537 Belisarius wrote to Justinian explaining that the imperial army was heavily outnumbered and asking for reinforcements. The emperor replied that more men were on their way.

One of the problems the defenders faced was the provisioning of the city. While the Goths were not able to block all its entrances, they were able to restrict the entry of food. Similarly, they were able to cut the aqueducts, and while there were springs in Rome these could not supply sufficient water for its inhabitants. It became clear that the city contained not enough soldiers but too many civilians, and Belisarius ordered that those in the city who were not involved in the fighting were to go to Naples. One night a group tried to force open the doors of the temple of Janus, near the forum. Traditionally, the gates had been opened in time of war, perhaps to suggest the departure of the god from his temple to aid the Romans, and recourse to such a frankly pagan practice suggests the desperation of some of the inhabitants of the city.[17]

16. *Wars* 5.14.14, evidence of a perception characterized above as being eastern rather than western (p. 12). Note however that there is some uncertainty about the reference to December, which has been supplied from a parallel passage in Evagrius (*Historia Ecclesiastica* 4.19) (*The Ecclesiastical History of Evagrius*, ed. J. Bidez and L. Parmenties, London 1898; trans. E. Walford, London 1851).
17. Needless to say the practice had long fallen into abeyance. There are references to the doors being closed in Ammianus Marcellinus 16.10.1 ed. and trans. J.C. Rolfe, London 1950–2 (on the visit of Constantius to Rome in 357) and Claudian *de cons Stil II* 2.287 ed. and trans. M. Platnauer, London 1922 (with reference to the early fifth century), but these are purely metaphorical.

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In a time of such low morale, accusations of treachery were rife.

One such accusation was particularly important. Pope Agapetus had died while still in Constantinople, and after news of this reached Rome a successor, Silverius, was elected, early in June 536. The new pope was the son of an earlier pontiff, pope Hormisdas, but he was imposed on the church by Theodahad, as a result of bribes it was believed. Despite his owing his elevation to the Gothic sovereign, he was chief among the Romans who urged Belisarius to come to Rome late in 536. Nevertheless, a few months later he was accused of treasonable negotiations with the Goths and brought before Belisarius. But the accusation of treachery was merely a pretext which allowed a more sinister operation to be effected. While in Constantinople, pope Agapetus had obtained the deposition of the patriarch of that city. This was not a universally popular action, and a Roman cleric of senatorial family who happened to be in Constantinople when Agapetus died, the deacon Vigilius, let it be known to Theodora that if he were to become pope he would reinstate the patriarch. Stories circulated that he told the empress that he was prepared not only to reinstate him but also to do away with the council of Chalcedon; a promise of 700 pounds of gold may have helped him reach this position. When it became clear that Silverius had no intention of rescinding what his predecessor had done, Vigilius was sent to Rome by Theodora with an order that he was to be made pope.

When Silverius was brought before Belisarius and his wife Antonina in the palace the general was occupying on the Pincian Hill, he must have realized that his days as pope were over. Accused of treason on the basis of a forged letter, he was stripped of his papal vestments, led away, and sent in exile to Patara, a town on the southern coast of what is now Turkey. Here he found himself the recipient of the good offices of the local bishop, who travelled on his behalf to Justinian. The emperor was moved by the bishop's argument that, while there were many kings in the world, there was only one pope, and ordered that Silverius be returned to Rome and that the correspondence on the basis of which he had been accused of treason be examined. But when Silverius returned to the city Belisarius, who had in the meantime imposed Vigilius on the papal throne, delivered him into the hands of his successor.

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Vigilius took no chances. Silverius was sent to Palmaria, a small island in the Tyrrhenian Sea some forty kilometres off the Italian coast, and was dead before the end of the year. There were reports of miracles occurring at his tomb.

The events were a first indication of what reintegration into the empire would mean for the papacy. The elevation of Vigilius showed that a posting in Constantinople could be an important item in the curriculum vitae of an ambitious member of the Roman clergy. More importantly, the influence Constantinople could have on the Roman church was clear for all to see. Whereas the Gothic kings had sometimes exerted an influence on the election of a pope, they had never sought to depose one. Emperors did not behave in such a gentlemanly fashion: of the 52 patriarchs of Constantinople who held office from the reign of Justinian until that of Alexios Comnenos (1081–1118), 19 or 20 were deposed or forced into temporary retirement,[18] and the fall of Silverius showed that popes were similarly at risk while Rome was part of the empire. For those with eyes to see, it was an event of ill omen for the freedom of Italy.

Meanwhile, the siege continued. While it was certainly eventful, 69 encounters being mentioned as having taken place (Procopius *Wars* 6.2.37), neither side was happy at the way it progressed. The Goths took care that no supplies entered the city, the inhabitants of which began to put pressure on Belisarius to risk all on a decisive battle; in reply, he affirmed that a mighty army was on its way to bring help. Disease became a problem in the city. But the Goths as well were suffering from hunger and disease, and as Roman reinforcements began to arrive they despaired of success. They sent three men to treat for peace, and a truce was concluded so that Gothic envoys could be sent to Constantinople to discuss terms of peace.

Roman advances in other parts of Italy hastened the ending of the siege. While it had been dragging on, Belisarius' lieutenants had captured various towns, among them Rimini, a town on the Adriatic coast perilously near Ravenna, the Gothic capital. The Roman general, John, was the nephew of Justinian's old rival Vitalian, and it was soon clear that he was

18. H.G. Beck 'Konstantinopel Zur Socialgeschichte einer früh-mittelalterlichen Haupstad' *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 58 1965: 11–45 at 27 n. 52.

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no less ambitious than his uncle. He made contact with Matasuentha, the granddaughter of Theoderic. Vitigis had married her, but she was an unhappy wife, who was pleased to discuss the betrayal of Ravenna and a possible marriage with John. Alarmed by this course of events and despairing of taking Rome, the Goths, who had received no news from the envoys sent to Justinian, abandoned their siege in mid-March 537. It had lasted one year and nine days.

The proper course of action for the invaders after their success was not clear, and ironically the capacity of the Romans to plan effectively was hampered by the arrival of another general. Narses came accompanied by 5000 troops, but he was a friend of Justinian and Theodora, a circumstance which weakened the authority of Belisarius. Following his advice Belisarius marched on Rimini, which the Goths had besieged. The town was relieved, but the advent of a new general who was reluctant to take orders from Belisarius in a situation already marked by animosities between the Roman commanders was awkward, so that the remaining period of the war was marked by disputes over both strategy and tactics.

Meanwhile, another Roman force had been sent to Liguria. Having sailed to Genoa and defeated a Gothic army at Pavia it was able to enter the great city of Milan unopposed. But the success was shortlived, for a Gothic force supported by 10 000 Burgundians sent by Theudebert the Frank captured it. Their task had been made easier by a falling out between Belisarius and Narses. The Goths are said to have razed the city to the ground in the early months of 539, killing 300 000 males and making slaves of the women. Among the victims was the praetorian prefect Reparatus, the brother of pope Vigilius, who had been appointed to the office after his predecessor Fidelis had been killed by Goths. The body of Reparatus was cut into small pieces and thrown to the dogs.[19]

Effectively, Italy had been divided into two zones. The invaders had occupied much of it, but the Gothic government continued to function in Ravenna. In 537–538 it took steps to

19. These details are known from Procopius *Wars* 6.21.39f. There may be distortion here, but as with this author's description of the taking of Naples in 536 his account seems likely to be basically accurate; cf Marcellinus comes *Chron. s.a.* 539 (Gothi . . . omnes Romanos interficiunt) and Marius of Aventicum *Chron. s.a.* 538.

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buy supplies in Istria, the peninsula in the north of the Adriatic which was far from the invaders. Justinian could not allow the progress of the war to be hampered by disputes between his generals, and in the spring of 539 Narses, who had accused Belisarius before a meeting of the commanders of acting contrary to the interests of the state, was recalled. Vitigis, meanwhile, took an enterprising step. In the belief that the best hope for the Goths lay in distracting Justinian's attention, he arranged for two Roman clergy to convey a message to Khusrau in Persia. His ambassadors represented Justinian as planning to take hold of all the earth; if he overcame the Goths, the Persians would be next, so it would be to the advantage of both Goths and Persians if Khusrau were to act against him (Procopius *Wars* 2.2.1–11, 6.22.17–20). Distracting an enemy by creating a diversion was an excellent idea, and recent history had seen various examples of interaction between eastern and western affairs. In the early years of the century Theoderic had made trouble for Anastasius when he was occupied with Khavad, and later it was rumoured that he and Vitalian planned to co-operate against the emperor. Similarly, a rebellion launched by the general Basiliscus against Zeno in 475–76 and that of Odovacer in Italy in 476 need not have been unco-ordinated. As it happened, in 540 the Great King was looking for reasons to make war on the emperor. Hence Justinian, on learning of the ploy of Vitigis, decided to make peace.

But before word of his intention reached Italy the military situation had changed. Belisarius invested Osimo, a strongly fortified town south of Ancona, and Vitigis, despite appeals from the besieged force, made no attempt to relieve it. The Goths finally surrendered and joined Belisarius' army, which made its way towards Ravenna and invested the city. Here a hard task awaited them, for the Gothic capital was difficult to take by siege, Theoderic himself having spent several years before its walls before the surrender of Odovacer in 493. While Vitigis was contemplating his options envoys from the Franks arrived proposing that, in return for an alliance, they and the Goths would share the rule of Italy. But a force of Franks led by king Theudebert had recently conducted a raid in Italy, and its behaviour towards the Goths had been abominable; at Pavia, Gothic women and children had been sacrificed. The Franks were scarcely desirable allies. Then envoys

from Belisarius appeared before the king arguing that it would be more in the interest of the Goths to throw in their lot with the emperor's forces, and this the king decided to do. Discussions had begun between the Goths and the Roman forces when ambassadors arrived from Constantinople, with news that Justinian was prepared to partition Italy: Vitigis and the Goths were to be allowed to hold that part north of the Po, while the remainder was to go to the emperor. Likewise, the treasure of the Goths was to be divided in two.

The Goths were prepared to accept these terms, and the war would have been ended on this basis had it not been for the refusal of Belisarius to give his consent. According to Procopius this was because he felt that he could win an outright victory over Vitigis (*Wars* 6.29.4), but some of the Romans felt he was plotting against the interests of the emperor and so protracting the war. It was then that some of the Goths hit upon a novel idea. They proposed to proclaim Belisarius emperor of the West, and privately asked him to assume this office.[20] It had lapsed in 476 when a barbarian chief deposed its last holder, Romulus Augustulus; now another group of barbarians was proposing to revive it and give it to Justinian's general. Belisarius would thereby have joined the long list of military men who had become Roman emperors. In his history of the wars, Belisarius' friend Procopius represents him as only pretending to be receptive to the overture of the Goths (6.29.20), but he may have found their proposal appealing. As we have seen, accusations had been made after the defeat of Gelimer that he was planning to establish his own monarchy in Africa. Further, accusations of

20. Procopius uses the noun βασιλεύς to describe the office which the Goths asked Belisarius to assume. It is the word he customarily uses for 'emperor', but it can also mean 'king' (see for example *Wars* 5.11.5, where it is applied to Vitigis). Hence the office of 'basileus of the Italians and Goths' which Procopius suggests the Goths dangled before Belisarius (*Wars* 6.29.26) could have been the imperial office, or it could have been nothing more than barbarian royalty. But a term Procopius uses elsewhere in this passage, 'emperor of the West' (*Wars* 6.29.18), seems technical. I am therefore uneasy with the translation offered by H. B. Dewing at *Wars* 6.30.28, which suggests a distinction between 'emperor' and 'king' not present in the Greek. See for further discussion of the point E. Stein *Histoire du bas-empire* 2 Paris 1949 p. 367 with n. 1, and H. Wolfram *History of the Goths* trans. T. J. Dunlap Berkeley Calif. 1988 p. 349 and n. 670.

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disloyalty had recently been made against Belisarius, who had come to enjoy vast powers in Italy during the war. He seems to have been able to appoint praetorian prefects without reference to Justinian, and while he had been in the Pincian Palace in Rome people approached him through curtains. To be sure, he had taken oaths of loyalty to the emperor, but these need not have stood in the way of ambition.

Whatever Belisarius really intended, the Goths were led to believe that he had accepted their proposal, and they offered no resistance as he marched into Ravenna in May 540. Gothic leaders in other centres submitted to him, with the exception of Ildibad, the commander in Verona. But inevitably, word of the agreement Belisarius had purportedly made with the Goths reached Justinian, who immediately ordered his general to return. His feelings must have been mixed, for Belisarius had succeeded in obtaining better terms than those which he had been prepared to accept himself. There may have been other reasons for the decision to summon Belisarius back to the east, for relations with Persia had been deteriorating and in March 540 Khusrau launched a major invasion of Roman territory. Justinian may have felt the need for the services of Belisarius, who had emerged as his star general, in this theatre. In any case, accompanied by Vitigis, his wife Matasuentha, other important Goths, and the Gothic treasure, Belisarius made his way to the royal city. But the contrast with his return in 534 was apparent. Then, he had been given a choice of remaining in Africa or not, and had been ceremonially greeted. In 540 he was recalled and held in suspicion.

But this aside, the wars of the 530s had fulfilled Justinian's steadily escalating hopes. It would be possible to make too much of these successes: the territory conquered amounted to somewhat less than half that of the old Empire in the West, and the combined budgets of the praetorian prefects of Italy and Africa and Illyricum were barely a quarter that of the prefecture of the East.[21] Nevertheless, Africa was the wealthiest region in the West, while Italy enjoyed immense prestige

21. M. Hendy *Studies in the Byzantine Monetary Economy c. 300–1450* Cambridge 1985 p. 171.

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because of the significance of Rome from both classical and Christian perspectives.[22] God, it must have seemed, had smiled on the ventures of his servant.

The clearest indication of what the victories meant to Justinian comes from the description of a mosaic he had installed in the ceiling of the Chalke ('Bronze') Gate, as the vestibule through which people entered the palace from the Mese was called. Originally erected by Anastasius, it had been rebuilt by Justinian after the Nika riot. The vestibule must have been impressive: some idea of what Anastasius' structure looked like can probably be gained indirectly from the depiction of Theoderic's palace in S Apollinare Nuovo in Ravenna, which is itself oddly similar to the facade of the sanctuary of the Great Mosque at Damascus which was constructed in the Umayyad period. In any case, we know from a carefully worded description that the mosaic Justinian placed in the ceiling depicted the taking of towns in Africa and Italy, and the victories he achieved through Belisarius, who was shown giving the emperor booty, kings and kingdoms. In the middle stood Justinian and Theodora, before whom the kings of the Vandals and Goths were brought as captives, while members of the senate stood around them, all keeping festival. The mosaic showed them exulting and smiling, as they gave the emperor honours equal to God (Procopius *Buildings* 1.10.16–19). Being depicted as receiving honours equal to God suggests in Justinian a vanity unusual even among Byzantine emperors. But everyone knew that the victories had really been due to Belisarius, whose conduct at the end of the Italian campaign can only have worsened suspicions already present in Justinian's mind. A curious passage in Procopius may be a pointer to Justinian's concerns. Late in 539 some Armenians were encouraging Khushrau the Persian to make war on Justinian, and one of the points they made was that he had nothing to fear from Belisarius, for the emperor was never going to see his general again. Indeed, the Armenians alleged, Belisarius was paying no attention to Justinian but remaining in the direction of the setting sun, having power in Italy (*Wars* 2.3.52). It is hard to know how to evaluate this passage, but it

22. So it is that John the Lydian refers to 'sacred Rome' (*Powers* 10.18, 168.9, 218.16), and that eastern authors generally thought of Rome as the capital of contemporary Italy.

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is one of a number in our sources which reveal elevated perceptions of the kind of power Belisarius had come to enjoy. A strange passage in a work written in Constantinople about a decade after Belisarius entered Ravenna states that 'Justinian the emperor, victorious and triumphant, and the consul Belisarius, shall be called Vandalicus, Africanus and Geticus'.[23] The bestowal of such titles was customary for emperors (cf. above p. 72), but not their subjects. At some stage, whether in the 530s or 540s, Belisarius made offerings to the Roman church. They were lavish, and the most significant was a jewelled gold cross of 100 pounds which, a contemporary source tells us, had an inscription about his victories.[24] Yet the description of the mosaic at the Chalke Gate describes them as Justinian's victories, merely achieved through Belisarius. As we shall see, a story was later told that, while Justinian lay ill with the plague in 542, Belisarius and some other generals fighting the Persians agreed that if another Justinian were to become emperor they would not put up with it (Procopius *Secret History* 4.2). Some of this evidence is anecdotal, and some of it from after 540. We have no direct evidence that Belisarius was tempted to disloyalty at the end of the Italian campaign, but jealousy could always be reckoned within the circles around an emperor, where courtiers could be relied on to fan the flames of suspicion. Roman history was full of examples of successful generals who had gone on to better things, and while Belisarius had won the victories for which he had been sent to the West, Justinian cannot have seen the manner in which the Goths were successfully defeated as an unmixed blessing.

23. Jordanes *Getica* 315 (ed. Th. Mommsen, *Monumenta Germaniae Historica Auctores Antiquissimi* 5; trans. C.C. Mierow, Princeton NJ 1915).
24. Davis *Book of Pontiffs* p. 56.

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Chapter 4

YEARS OF FRUSTRATION

. . .

THE PROBLEM OF PERSIA

Late in the sixth century some elephants which had been captured from the Persians were accustomed to walk in single file through the streets of Constantinople. Whenever they passed a church the leading elephant turned to the east, bowed down and made the sign of the cross with its trunk; those following each did the same in turn.[1] The pious behaviour of the animals can be compared to a statue which Justinian erected in the Augusteum, an open space to the south of Hagia Sophia and the west of the senate house, two works he had built after the Nika riots. Here, atop a lofty column, was a huge statue of Justinian on horseback, perhaps three or four times larger than life. Looking towards the east, the figure of the emperor held in his left hand a globe, representing the world, surmounted by a cross, the symbol of Christian victory, while his right hand was extended eastward in a gesture which contemporaries recognised as a command to the barbarians in that direction to remain seated at home. (Procopius *Buildings* 1.2.1–12)

Despite the wars in the West, Justinian's priorities remained still largely eastern. They were clearly revealed in the midst of cut-backs which were made to the *cursus publicus*, the costly state post which was maintained for the use of officials travelling on official business and the transport of materials for

1. John of Ephesos *Historia ecclesiastica* trans. E.W. Brooks, *Corpus Scriptorum Christianoram Orientalium* (Scriptores Syri 3rd ser. 3) 2. 48.

military or other state purposes. In some areas it was abolished and elsewhere it was restricted, to the loss of the rural producers who had sold produce to the stations where horses and oxen were kept and accommodation provided. But on the road leading to Persia the service was retained intact. Indeed, at Nicaea the quarters of the couriers were improved by the restoration of a bath. Persia was still seen as the major threat to the empire.

The power of Persia had been an intermittent problem for the peoples of the eastern Mediterranean for centuries. Based as they were on the vast uplands between Mesopotamia and the Indus River, the Persians could look in various directions, but when their capital was in the west a policy oriented towards the Mediterranean was always likely. This had been the case just over a thousand years prior to the time of Justinian, when Darius and Xerxes attacked Greece. During the Hellenistic period Persian power had diminished, but in AD 226 a new dynasty, the Sasanians, came to power. The diplomatic protocol of the time described the shahs of Persia as the brothers of the emperors, but their relations with Constantinople were only one of their concerns. After the calamitous Arab invasion of the seventh century it made sense for the last Sasanian monarch to appeal for aid to the Chinese, with whom the Persians had extensive trade relations; in the eighth century, members of the royal family were still living at the cosmopolitan Tang capital. But the title Persian rulers used in correspondence, 'King of kings of Iran and non-Iran', whatever its precise meaning, could be interpreted by other powers in an alarming way. In 363 the emperor Julian the Apostate invaded Persia in a campaign which may have been designed to recall the days of Alexander the Great, but after he died of wounds sustained on the campaign hostile encounters between the states tended to take the form of raids rather than invasions.

As is so often the case with ancient peoples adjacent to the classical world, the bulk of our documentary evidence about the Persians comes from works written by their enemies. Indeed, the very word 'Persia' is Greek, for the inhabitants of this state referred to it as Iran. Procopius, like Herodotus before him, described Persian affairs in some detail, but theirs are obviously the works of outsiders. Procopius' continuator Agathias based his discussion of Persian matters on material excerpted on his behalf from the Persian royal annals (4.30),

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and his account has interesting similarities with traditions preserved in later eastern sources; despite this, the impression he gives of the Persians is negative. While the Sasanians were Zoroastrians, adherents of a religion preached in the distant past which had developed a cult of fire worship and a class of powerful clergy, the Magi, they ruled over a state which included flourishing minorities of Jews, who produced the Babylonian Talmud, and Christians, whose school at Nisibis became important from the late fifth century. It is clear from the magnificent silverware preserved in the Hermitage at St Petersburg that Sasanian society was one of wealth and sophistication, and Justinian seems to have been well-matched in Khusrau (Greek 'Chosroes'), his great contemporary.

Under Khusrau's father Kavad (488–531), Persia had become stronger, and his own reign (531–579) was to prove the high-water mark of Sasanian power. He was given the nick-name 'Anushirwan', 'of immortal soul'. It seems that Khusrau was more inclined to look towards the empire than other Sasanians. A reform of the tax system he instituted was apparently modelled on that of the empire, and he was reputed to be a scholar of Greek philosophy; it was to his court that the seven philosophers fled early in Justinian's reign. But it was also believed that a king of India had sent him a game of chess, and perhaps Khusrau was interested in all the neighbouring civilizations. In any case, he was a rival worthy of Justinian. The massive brick vault of a palace he built at his capital on the Euphrates, Ctesiphon, still stands, some thirty metres in span and a little more in height. A new town built by Khusrau near Ctesiphon was given a name which mocked the chief city of Syria: it was Veh Antiok Khusrau, 'Better than Antioch has Khusrau [built this]'.[2] Eight hundred years later the Arab author Ibn Khaldun was to quote Khusrau as an authority on good government.

The frontier between Persian and Roman territory was part of the long eastern border of the empire, which extended southwards from the eastern shore of the Black Sea. To the eastern side of the northernmost section of the frontier were the Armenians. Further south, in the region between the

2. R.N. Frye 'The political history of Iran under the Sasanians' in E. Yarshater ed. *The Cambridge History of Iran* 3 *The Seleucid, Parthian and Sasanian Periods* Cambridge 1983 pp. 116–80 at 155.

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Tigris and Euphrates known as Mesopotamia, the frontier separated Roman and Persian territory. The defence of this border was a great concern to the empire, which was reflected in the way Procopius organized his material in the *Buildings*: after a first book devoted to works carried out in Constantinople, he passed immediately to describing the fortifications built on the Persian frontier. South of the Euphrates the border proceeded in a more westerly direction towards the Gulf of Aqaba. The border in this third section, running as it did through country which was largely desert, was not well defined. The territory on its eastern side was controlled by Arabs, people then coming to be known as 'Saracens', an obscure word, possibly of Arabic origin, which means 'easterners'. Plenty could go wrong along a long border such as this, and as it happened by 540 there was trouble right along it.

The Armenians were restless. It has been the misfortune of the Armenian people at various stages of their long history to have had to accommodate themselves to more powerful neighbours, often transient by Armenian standards, and in the time of Justinian the Roman and Persian states were such neighbours. At the beginning of the fourth century Christianity had been adopted as the religion of Armenia. Ultimately this decision tended to pull it into the Byzantine sphere of influence, but this consequence cannot have been foreseen, for at the time it was taken Christians were still being persecuted in the Roman empire, and the path of the Armenian church was to be one of sturdy independence. Important manifestations of this were the invention of the Armenian alphabet in *c.* 400 and the subsequent growth of a vernacular literature, and the failure of the Armenians to accept the teachings of the council of Chalcedon (451).

Late in the fourth century the Romans and Persians had partitioned Armenia. Initially the portion of Armenia which fell to Rome remained under the control of hereditary Armenian satraps, but their ill-advised support of an unsuccessful claimant to the throne in the 480s and Justinian's reforms of the 530s had cost them their power. One of the consequences of Justinian's administrative reforms was that in 536 the satrapies were finally abolished in all the region under Byzantine control. Justinian must have viewed this as nothing more than the tidying up of a local administrative anomaly, but the development was not well received by the Armenians, and the

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changing of the name of Martyropolis, the city on which the Byzantine administration was based, to Justinianopolis can have done nothing to smooth irritated feelings. Before long they were in revolt. In 538–539 Justinian despatched against them Sittas, a rising general who had married Theodora's sister Komito, but the Armenians succeeded in killing him. Following this bold stroke they desperately needed support, and sent ambassadors to Khusrau. A report of their speech suggests that they painted an alarming picture of Justinian: the entire earth, they maintained, could not hold a man with his ambitions for conquest, they claimed, and following his victories in the West he was already plotting against Persia. Now, the Armenians declared, while the bulk of his armed forces was still in the West, was the time for Khusrau to strike (Procopius *Wars* 2.3.32–53).

Trouble also loomed in the desert to the south of Mesopotamia, the home of the Arabs. In the early days of the empire Rome had dealt with the threat they posed by supporting client kingdoms. This method was later replaced by a system of fortifications manned by frontier troops, the *limitanei*, but from the early fifth century no new forts were built, and by the mid-sixth century at least some of them had been abandoned. At Umm el-Jimel in north Jordan, for example, a large fort built in the third century was given over in the fifth century to domestic and possibly commercial uses. On the other hand, we know that one fort, Hallabat, was restored in 529, so generalization seems difficult. But there is no doubt that a move away from forts occurred, and it is possible to interpret this development in a sinister light. Centuries later Muslim authors told how the Prophet Muhammad, although still a boy, had been recognized by Bahira, a monk or hermit of Bostra (the modern Bosra), the capital of the Roman province of Arabia, when he passed through the town as a member of an Arab caravan.[3] Perhaps, it might be thought, the move away from forts opened the way to a rise in Arab

3. Historians are not certain what weight to place on Arab trade of the period: compare Patricia Crone *Meccan Trade and the Rise of Islam* Oxford 1987 and I. Shahid *Byzantium and the Semitic Orient Before the Rise of Islam* London 1988. Concerning the legendary encounter between Muhammad and Bahira, see A. Abel 'Bahira' in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* 2nd edn 1 1960 pp. 922f.

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influence which had as its climax the extraordinary expansion of Arab power in the years after the death of the Prophet. But the region enjoyed prosperity in Justinian's time: in Umm el-Jimel the construction of domestic houses came to a climax in the sixth century and most if not all of its fourteen churches were built between the late fifth and early seventh centuries.[4] The abandonment of forts can be seen not as a policy of retrenchment but as part of a change in military strategy which saw the Romans reverting to their earlier policy of cultivating some of the Arabs.[5]

So it was that Justinian's eye fell on a Monophysite Christian, Harith, the ruler of the Ghassanid Arabs. His father had already had dealings with the Romans, and it seemed that he would be a worthy representative of Roman interests. In about 528 he was given the title Phylarch, and made his headquarters at the caravan town of Sergiopolis, the modern Rusafah, 25 kilometres south of the Euphrates. Harith found his position advantageous, for after the Samaritan revolt in 529 there came into his possession 20 000 Samaritan children whom he was able to sell in the markets of Persia and India. But Persia was also interested in strengthening its ties with the Arabs and opposed to Harith was a long-standing ally of Persia, al-Mundhir, the ruler of the Lakhamids of al-Hira, an experienced commander based at al-Hira with several raids into Roman territory to his credit. A staunch pagan, on one occasion he was reputed to have sacrificed 400 Christian virgins to his deities.

Both the great powers, then, sought to use the Arabs. Nevertheless, they remained a constant irritant. In 536 a body of them estimated to number 15 000 responded to dry weather by crossing into Roman territory south of the Euphrates, where the local duke had to deal with them. A few years later Harith and al-Mundhir fell out over the control of

4. Bert de Vries 'Urbanization in the Basalt region of north Jordan in late antiquity: the case of Umm el-Jimel' in A. Hadidi ed. *Studies in the History and Archaeology of Jordan* 2 Amman/London 1985 pp. 249–56. Note as well the comment of M. Piccirillo that in the period from the fifth to the seventh centuries Jordanian territory reached its maximum development of sedentary life and urbanization (ibid. vol. 3 p. 165).
5. S. Thomas Parker *Romans and Saracens: A History of the Arabian Frontier* Winona Lake In. 1986. But see below p. 163 for the erection of a military complex in Syria late in Justinian's reign.

a stretch of impoverished country to the south of Palmyra (the modern Tadmur), named Strata. Justinian sent two officials to enquire into the dispute, but they gave different advice, one recommending that the Romans not give way and the other that they not press the issue and so supply Khusrau with a pretext for the war he seemed to want to wage.

Developments concerning the Armenians and the Arabs therefore gave Khusrau reason to think of ending the peace. They occurred against the background of the desperate appeal of the Ostrogothic king Vitigis that he attack the Romans. A speech Procopius represents the ambassadors of Vitigis making before Khusrau described Justinian as wanting to lay his hands on the whole earth (*Wars* 2.2.6), a charge similar to that which the Armenian legates are said to have made, and Justinian's remarkable successes during the 530s may have made such an assertion plausible. When hostilities broke out the Romans naturally attributed Khusrau's aggression to his being filled with malice and fury after Justinian's successes in the West, and it may well be that Khusrau thought that the balance of power between Persia and Rome had changed for the worse since the perpetual peace had been agreed to in 532.

So it was that Khusrau struck boldly during the early spring of 540. With a large force he advanced along the lightly populated southern side of the Euphrates. Crossing into Roman territory, Khusrau captured the town of Sura, which he proceeded to destroy, and advanced further, seeking sums of money from various towns. Justinian, on hearing of the threat, had sent his cousin, Germanus, to Antioch, with three hundred men, but he achieved little. He and the patriarch Ephrem had already seen fit to leave the city when Khusrau reached it in June and demanded a thousand pounds of gold. When payment was not forthcoming Khusrau stormed the walls. Its defenders, regular soldiers supplemented by members of the factions of the Hippodrome, were no match for the Persian troops, who were quickly able to scale the walls. Many of the inhabitants of the city were massacred, and Khusrau, who suffered from no love of Christianity, helped himself to the wealth of the cathedral. Those of the inhabitants who did not flee were enslaved, and the city fired. Oddly enough, the cathedral was to be spared.

The loss was devastating for Justinian. Antioch had been

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founded by one of the generals of Alexander the Great late in the fourth century BC, and had grown to become the capital of Syria and the third city of the empire. Located on the Orontes River some thirty kilometres upstream from the coast, it was a true Mediterranean city, and its capture in 540 was the first occasion since the third century on which Persians had taken it. Its sack in 540 came after a number of other misfortunes: Antioch had suffered from a great fire in 525 and earthquakes in 526 and in 528, after the second of which it had been renamed Theopolis, 'City of God'. Following the disaster of 540, Justinian rebuilt the city. The enterprise is described at length by Procopius (*Buildings* 2.10.2–25), but in terms which suggest that the new city was a scaled-down version of the old.

But this lay in the future. After his capture of the city Khusrau demanded 5000 pounds of gold. Justinian's representatives on the spot accepted the terms, but had to send to Constantinople for confirmation. Meanwhile, Khusrau made his way to Seleucia and bathed in the waters of the Mediterranean, a rare pleasure for a Persian shah, before going to Apamea, where he took the treasure of the town and attended the races at the Hippodrome, whence he proceeded homewards through Mesopotamia. For as long as he was in Roman territory he helped himself to plunder along the way. The last town he attacked, Daras, was near the border, and important to the Romans. One of the set-pieces in Procopius' *Buildings* (2.1.4–3.26) is the long passage on the fortifications at Daras, which is placed at the beginning of the book devoted to Mesopotamia. The emperor Anastasius had begun to fortify the site, but Procopius describes major activities undertaken by Justinian, which included strengthening the walls and towers and the construction of cisterns to save water. Modern scholars have found it difficult to establish the respective contributions of these two emperors,[6] but Justinian was furious when he heard of Khusrau's futile attempt to take the town. He treated it as a hostile act which abrogated the agreement which his representatives had concluded with Khusrau.

6. See the differing assessments of Brian Croke and James Crow 'Procopius and Dara' *Journal of Roman Studies* 73 1983: 143–59, and M. Whitby 'Procopius' description of Dara' in P. Freeman and D. Kennedy eds *The Defence of the Roman and Byzantine East* Oxford 1986 737–83.

Inconclusive hostilities were to last for several years. In the spring of 541 Belisarius, fresh from the war in Italy, was sent to the Persian frontier, commanding a force which included Gothic troops he had brought to Constantinople in the preceding year. Khusrau, however, had turned his attention to the east of the Black Sea, where a people called the Lazi lived. The territory they occupied was of some strategic importance, for it blocked passes which otherwise would have been open to potential invaders from the steppes to the north of the Caucasus. Justinian, who seems to have had the knack of effortlessly antagonizing the small neighbours of the empire, had annoyed the Lazi by sending military forces to Lazica and establishing a major fortification at the town of Petra on the coast of the Black Sea. So it was that the Lazi followed the example of the Armenians and sought an alliance with Khusrau. Pleased with the prospect of access to the Black Sea, he accepted their appeal, and in 541 led an army to Lazica. The town of Petra was captured and Khusrau helped himself to its wealth. An expedition which Belisarius led into Persian territory while this was going on accomplished little, but when Khusrau heard of his activities he left Lazica, bringing to an end a campaigning season which had worked in his favour. In 542 Khusrau again led an army into Roman territory, but this time Belisarius was able to turn his expedition aside. Shortly afterwards, however, the general was recalled to Constantinople. This puzzling incident is mentioned by Procopius in two of his works, where very different interpretations are placed on it. In his history of Justinian's wars Procopius asserts that Belisarius was recalled to Constantinople by the emperor so that he could be sent to Italy again (Procopius *Wars* 2.21.34). But in his *Secret History*, a work allegedly written to correct the untruths of his earlier writing, Procopius states that a report reached the army fighting the Persians that Justinian had died from the plague, whereupon Belisarius and other generals engaged in some loose talk to the effect that they would not tolerate another emperor like Justinian. This came to the attention of Theodora, who summoned the generals to the royal city. One of them, Buzes, disappeared into a dungeon, from which he was to emerge two years later in poor condition, while Belisarius was relieved of his command (*Secret History* 4.1–16). Unfortunately, the latter version is likely to be correct, for Belisarius was only sent to Italy in

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544, inexplicably late if he had been recalled for this purpose in 542; further, the words Procopius uses to describe his recall in the former version are formulaic, being suspiciously similar to those he used when he described the recall of Belisarius from the Persian front under a cloud a decade earlier (*Wars* 1.21.2).[7] We may take it, then, that whatever words Belisarius uttered to his military cronies in 542 came to form another item in Justinian's steadily lengthening dossier of grounds for mistrusting him.

By 543 Romans and Persians were each suffering from the plague, and little came of attacks launched by both sides. In particular, an immense Roman force marched into Armenia, but it was defeated. In 544 Khusrau led an army against the town of Edessa. The city withstood a siege with vigour, and Khusrau departed after receiving 500 pounds of gold. But the shah's appetite for war was diminishing, and in 545 the two powers came to an agreement that there would be peace for five years. Justinian paid Khusrau 5000 pounds of gold. He sought the return of Lazica, but Khusrau would not relinquish his gain. Each party could take some satisfaction from this result. Khusrau received a payment which would have been in line with expectations if he had continued to launch raids into Roman territory, and had made a useful gain in Lazica, while Justinian, who was by now confronted with a deteriorating situation in both Italy and Africa, became free to turn his attention elsewhere. But the terms of the peace were scarcely glorious, and in retrospect the inconclusive war could be seen as marking a turning of the tide after the successes of the 530s. When Procopius wrote his *Secret History* in 550, he claimed that after Belisarius failed to stand up to the empress Theodora in a personal matter just prior to Khusrau's attack of 542, the power of God opposed him in everything he did (3.30). The judgment was made with the aid of hindsight, and concerned Belisarius rather than Justinian, but it is clear that Justinian was going to find it difficult to sustain the momentum of the extraordinary accomplishments of the early years into the 540s.

7. The chronicle of Marcellinus comes also indicates that Belisarius was recalled in disgrace: *sub anno* 545.3 (*Chron.* ed. Th. Mommsen, *Monumenta Germaniae Historica Auctores Antiquissimi* 11). See further above, p. 23.

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THE PLAGUE

In the spring of 542 many people in Constantinople found themselves suffering from a strange disease.[8] They began to experience fevers, and then bubonic swellings appeared on their groins, armpits or other parts of their bodies. Before long some sunk into comas, while others became delirious, their wild behaviour making life difficult for those who were looking after them. Large pustules broke out on some, who soon died; others died when they vomited blood. Effective treatment of the disease proved beyond the skill of the doctors. It spread mysteriously, but apparently not by contact with those afflicted by it.

The disease which terrified the inhabitants of the empire was a variant of the bubonic plague. Spreading from Egypt, where it had struck in 541, it passed across the empire, reaching Constantinople in 542 and Italy in 543, before proceeding further into western Europe. Its impact was grim. In one Egyptian town a boy of ten was the only survivor, while some communities in Syria were wiped out. The plague was exceptionally savage in Constantinople. According to a contemporary estimate, there were 16 000 victims in the city on one day, and when the number of fatalities came to 230 000 people stopped counting. The city became filled with corpses, so Justinian ordered one of his officials, Theodore the referendarius, to hire labourers who would dig a number of great ditches on the far side of the Golden Horn, each large enough, we are told, to hold 70 000 bodies. The corpses were flung into them and then trampled underfoot to allow as many as possible to be squeezed in. Other bodies were piled in towers which had been erected for military purposes. This lack of respect for the dead was a sad state of affairs in a society which placed great importance on burial arrangements, and was widely noted. Many turned to the practice of religion in their despair. At the town of Sykeon in Galatia a boy of about twelve fell victim to the plague. His family took him to a shrine

8. For what follows, see Pauline Allen 'The "Justinianic" plague' *Byzantion* 49 1979: 5–20, and the richly documented study of Karl-Heinz Leven, 'Die «Justinianische» Peste' *Jahrbuch des Instituts für Geschichte der Medizin der Robert Bosch Stiftung* 6 1987: 137–61.

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where he was healed; later he became a famous holy man. A monk in Palestine who was asked to pray that God turn his wrath aside explained that things would have been worse had it not been for the prayers of three good people. The impact of the plague on the morale of the empire is impossible to measure, but it may have been devastating.

We lack precise evidence which would allow us to determine the incidence of mortality. The plague stimulated writers to flights of rhetoric which, depending on the author, could take the form of an imitation of Thucydides' description of the plague in Athens or quotations from Jeremiah or Ezechiel. One contemporary felt that half the population died. As it happens there is good reason to doubt this,[9] but there are signs that the impact of the plague was severe. In 543 legislation was enacted dealing with the rights of the heirs of people who had died without having made a will, and in the following year problems arising from litigation after deaths were dealt with. Earlier law had not dealt in a satisfactory way with the system of inheritance to be followed when someone died intestate, but that Justinian legislated on the topic when he did is a sign of the contemporary urgency of the question. Moralists claimed that those who had inherited large sums, greedy for yet more, were taking wealthy widows rather than virgins for their wives.

As we have seen, among those who suffered from the plague was Justinian himself, who developed a swelling in his groin. It did not prove fatal, but for as long as he was ill there was a change in the balance of power in favour of Theodora. Of more lasting importance were the social consequences of the plague, which was to break out again in Constantinople in 558. According to one report, after the plague struck the launderers put up their prices, and legislation of 544 complained that traders, craftspeople, farmers and sailors had doubled or tripled the prices of their goods or labour, a development which was attributed to avarice. Legislation attempting to fix maximum wages was introduced in England in 1349 and 1351, shortly after the arrival of the Black Death, and we may conclude that in sixth-century Byzantium, as in fourteenth-century England, a high incidence of mortality had caused a

9. E. Stein *Histoire du bas-empire* 2 Paris 1949 p. 765 n. 1.

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scarcity of labour. It may not be accidental that there was a shortage of wine in Constantinople in 543.

One other consequence of the plague deserves mention. While the army of the empire in the West had become progressively barbarized during the last decades of its life in the fifth century, the forces which Belisarius led to Africa and Italy were substantially indigenous to the empire. This was no longer the case with armies after the plague struck. Not only were reinforcements grudgingly sent to theatres of war, but the new troops were more likely to be barbarians than had been the case earlier.[10] Such circumstances go a long way towards explaining the curiously inconsequential nature of Justinian's military enterprises against the Persians, as well as in Italy, Africa and the Balkans, in the 540s.

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DISTRACTIONS IN THE WEST

It was against this unpropitious background that the position of the Goths in Italy underwent a major resurgence. This development, quite unanticipated after the apparently definitive victory won by Belisarius in 540, would have been unwelcome at the best of times, and it occurred when Justinian's capacity to respond had been weakened. Resources had been transferred to the eastern frontier to deal with the sudden threat posed by the inroads made by Khusrau, with the result that the generals who had helped Belisarius defeat Vitigis were as likely to turn up on the Persian frontier as in Italy during the following decade. Moreover, the impact of the plague made it harder to dispatch armies where they were needed. As time passed Justinian was made uncomfortably aware that the cause of the Goths was by no means defunct, and that coping with them effectively required resources on a scale beyond those Belisarius had needed to defeat Vitigis.

When Belisarius entered Ravenna in May 540 it must have looked as if the Gothic war had been brought to a triumphant conclusion. But this was far from the case, for unlike the Vandals the Goths had not been decisively defeated in the field. Some of them, stung by Belisarius' refusal to become emperor, chose a new king, Ildibad, a nephew of Theudis who,

10. John L. Teall 'The barbarians in Justinian's armies' *Speculum* 40 1965: 294–322.

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although an Ostrogoth, was then king of the Visigoths. Before accepting the office Ildibad sent Belisarius an embassy which repeated the offer the Goths had already made, but Belisarius again turned it down. When the loyal general left Ravenna shortly afterwards with Vitigis and other prominent Ostrogoths as his captives, as well as a good part of the Gothic treasure, the way was open for Ildibad, with no Roman commander-in-chief to oppose him, to set about restoring the fortunes of the Goths. This he did in no uncertain way.

The Goths quickly made advances. Before long all of Italy north of the Po was under Ildibad's control, while the failure of the Byzantine administration to pay its troops effectively meant that the opposing forces were low in morale and full of potential defectors. The administration of the Goths had been efficient, but when Justinian placed the financial affairs of Italy in the hands of a notorious penny-pincher the tax-payers found themselves far worse off. Ildibad was murdered in 541, as was his successor, but this opened the way for the accession of one of the greatest Gothic kings, Totila, later in the same year.[11] For the first time, Justinian was faced by an enemy in the west of undoubted competence. In 542 Totila marched south of the Po to win a great victory at Faenza. Quickly moving into the south of Italy he took Benevento, Cumae and Naples. It was an amazingly quick reversal of the situation of 540, and it occurred at the same time as Justinian's illness. A sensible response to the deteriorating situation would have been the posting of Belisarius back to Italy, where he had not only been successful but was respected. But the strategy would have depended on the good faith of Belisarius, and as we have seen, much power passed into the hands of Theodora, who had no love for the empire's star general, during the illness of her husband. Hence, following his recall from the Persian front, Belisarius languished in Constantinople. Only in 544 was he appointed to Italy again, arriving in Ravenna towards the end of the year. Desperately short of troops, he was powerless to stop the Gothic advances, and an appeal he made to Justinian in 545 for reinforcements fell on deaf ears. Nevertheless, his attempt to gain additional support had one

11. I give the name of the new king in the form provided by the majority of written sources. On coins, however, his name appears as Baduila or Baduela, and forms like this occur in some written texts.

unexpected result. His ambitious emissary John, the nephew of Vitalian, was the man who had earlier been interested in marrying Theoderic's grand-daughter Matasuentha. Now he took advantage of his presence in the royal city to contract a marriage to Justina, the daughter of Justinian's cousin Germanus.

In December 545 Totila besieged Rome. Cut off from military aid and food supplies, and under the control of a corrupt general, the city was in poor heart. In the absence of pope Vigilius, the people looked for leadership to a deacon, Pelagius, who happened to be a friend of Justinian. The cleric made his way out of the city to negotiate with Totila, but nothing came of their talk. Belisarius was unable to relieve the city, and in December 546 the Goths entered it. Totila summoned the senate and reproached its members for disloyalty to the cause of the Goths, but at the insistence of Pelagius did them no harm. He sent Pelagius and another ambassador to treat with Justinian, but the emperor refused to deal with them, and told them to speak with Belisarius, a significant sign of confidence in his general's loyalty. But as it happened Belisarius was able to turn the tables on Totila. The Gothic king had decided to tear down the walls of Rome, set fire to its buildings and, people believed, turn the city into a sheep-walk. Hearing of this, Belisarius wrote to his enemy, pointing out the beauty of the city and the damage that would be done to his reputation if he destroyed it. Astonishingly, Totila evacuated the city, taking the senators with him and sending its other inhabitants into Campania, and left it empty. For forty days, a contemporary noted, Rome lay desolate, inhabited by neither humans nor animals. After this Belisarius had the pleasure of entering it, rebuilding its walls, repopulating it, and sending its keys to Justinian. To his shame, Totila was unable to recapture the city he had so foolishly abandoned.

The tide had apparently turned in favour of the invaders. But they were still desperately short of resources, and in 548 Belisarius' wife Antonina made her way from Italy to the capital to seek help. She hoped to use ties of friendship to prevail upon Theodora, but when she arrived in Constantinople it was to learn that the empress had died, on 28 June. Feeling that her mission could not now succeed, Antonina asked that Belisarius be recalled. This was done, and he left Italy later in the same year.

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But Belisarius was not the only person to make the journey from Italy to Constantinople in these years. As we shall see, from January 547 pope Vigilius was in Constantinople, and he was soon joined by aristocrats who had fled from Rome after Totila's capture of the city at the end of 546. They included Cethegus, a patrician and the most senior of the Roman consuls, who persistently urged Justinian to step up the war effort. We know from ecclesiastical documents that Cethegus was in Constantinople in 550 and 553, so presumably he remained there until the end of the war, after which he lived in Sicily. Another Italian to find his way to Constantinople during the war was Theoderic's old official Cassiodorus. Doubtless such people found congenial company in the royal city. Justinian himself and members of his family were good at Latin, the master of the offices was Peter the patrician, an intimidating intellectual who had spent some years in Italy as a prisoner of the Ostrogoths, and Constantinople was also home to authors such as John the Lydian, who was capable of writing a text in Greek which contained allusions to Homer and Vergil in equal numbers. To be sure, there were those with narrower horizons; the chronicler John Malalas, for example, seems to have been all at sea when it came to Vergil. But the strength of the Latin-speaking element in Constantinople was notably enhanced by the arrival of refugees in the middle of the century, and Justinian found himself under increasing pressure to deal with a war which showed no sign of ending. But he had other concerns. In 547–548 a wily Persian ambassador, Isdigousnas Zich, spent ten months in Constantinople. Justinian treated the ambassador with the utmost respect, giving him money and presents valued at a thousand pounds of gold. That he was so generous to such an inconsequential purpose and at such a time indicates that Justinian remained vitally concerned with his eastern neighbour.

Developments in Africa were also worrying.[12] In 543 the Moors rose in revolt, and in the following year Solomon, the

12. Averil Cameron 'Byzantine Africa – the literary evidence' in J.H. Humphrey ed. *Excavations at Carthage 1978 conducted by the University of Michigan* 7 Ann Arbor 1982: 29–62, offers an excellent discussion of its topic; see too P.-A. Février 'Approches récentes de l'Afrique byzantine' *Revue de l'Occident Musulman et de la Mediterranée* 35 1981: 25–53, and Y. Moderan 'Corippe et l'occupation byzantine de l'Afrique: pour une nouvelle lecture de la Johannide' *Antiquités africaines* 22 1986: 195–212.

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Syrian general to whom Justinian had entrusted the highest military and civilian offices in Africa simultaneously, was killed. Justinian appointed the dead man's nephew, Sergius, to the offices his uncle had held, but it was a poor choice, for Sergius quickly made himself unpopular with both the army and the civilians of Africa, while the Moors held him in utter contempt. In 545 the emperor thought to retrieve the situation by sending another official, Areobindus, to share the command with Sergius. The new man was closely connected with Justinian, having married Praeiecta, the daughter of the emperor's sister, but quickly showed himself incompetent. He was unable to deal with the Moors, who found themselves able to sack the capital, Carthage, and in 546 a rebellious officer slew him after a banquet. If this was not enough, at about this time a Visigothic force crossed the Strait of Gibraltar and attacked Septem. The invaders were overcome, a circumstance which a Spanish source attributes to their having been attacked after they had laid aside their weapons in honour of the Lord's Day, but the incident was a reminder that aggression could flow from Spain into Africa as easily as from Africa into Spain. Justinian took matters in hand later in the year by appointing a new commander. John Troglita was an experienced general with a good record against the Moors, and he set about restoring the situation. He was able to win a major victory in 548, after which Africa knew peace.

In Italy, meanwhile, things went from bad to worse following the departure of Belisarius. Totila made some handy gains, and in 549 he besieged Rome, which fell in the following January, having been betrayed by imperial troops. This time he made it clear that he was there to stay, and when he went on to preside over races in the Circus Maximus he was clearly asserting that he was the legitimate sovereign of the city. Indeed, the inhabitants of the city felt that Totila lived among them like a father with his children. In the same year he responded to a failure by Justinian to discuss peace by plundering Sicily. Justinian sent Liberius to Sicily, but the general's advanced age prompted second thoughts and he was replaced by an Armenian, Artabanes who, as we shall see, had recently been involved in a conspiracy against the emperor. But more serious measures were needed, and in 550 Justinian finally took decisive action.

In that year he appointed his cousin Germanus to lead a

large expedition. It was a sensible decision, for Germanus had a good deal of military experience and had received a higher education in Latin as well as Greek. His appointment also reflected a change in the balance of power at court. The murder of Areobindus in Africa had made a widow of his wife Praeiecta. The emperor's niece was a desirable match, and she agreed to marry Artabanes, an ambitious Armenian general serving in Africa. Artabanes made his way to the capital in 546 where he was well received by Justinian. However, he had neglected to tell Praeiecta that he was already married, and after his estranged wife appealed to Theodora for assistance he was forced to resume living with her. Praeiecta went on to take another husband. This was John, the grandson of Anastasius' nephew Hypatius who had been put to death after being acclaimed emperor during the Nika riots of 532. It is a striking sign of the continued prestige of the house of Anastasius that Justinian was prepared to accept this marriage, which must have set the members of the palace recalculating the probabilities of the succession after the death of Justinian, whose marriage had been childless.

But this was not the end of Artabanes. When Theodora died in 548 he dismissed his wife, and began paying attention to the treacherous suggestions of Arsaces, another disaffected member of the old Armenian royal house, that they strike against Justinian. The story of the conspiracy is known only from one source (Procopius *Wars* 7.31f) which may well be inaccurate. Those involved were playing a risky game for high stakes and must have sought to cover their tracks, while the historian could scarcely have allowed himself the luxury of supporting them. But it seems that the conspirators tried to inveigle Justin, the elder son of Germanus, into joining a plot against Justinian which would see his replacement as emperor by Germanus. However, the young man told his father what was afoot. Germanus then arranged to meet an associate of the plotters while a trustworthy person eavesdropped, and overheard a plan to kill Justinian, Belisarius and the commander of the bodyguard together. The matter was finally brought to the attention of Justinian, who ordered that torture was to be applied to the conspirators to force them to confess. Artabanes was dismissed from his posts and held at the palace, while Germanus and his son were acquitted.

So ended the first-known conspiracy against Justinian; it was

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not to be the last. Perhaps we can interpret it as a stage in the development of hostility towards the emperor. In any case, it is a reminder that the career of Germanus had not flourished while Theodora was alive. The empress had never shown enthusiasm for Justinian's relatives, preferring to forward the careers of those who would be under obligation to herself, and her demise may have freed Justinian to appoint Germanus. He prepared himself for the expedition to Italy by taking an enterprising step. Among the members of the Gothic royal family taken to Constantinople by Belisarius in 540 was Matasuentha, Theoderic's granddaughter, whom Vitigis had married on becoming king. Vitigis had died, as had Germanus' first wife, and so he was able to take Matasuentha in marriage, believing that if the grand-daughter of the respected Theoderic accompanied him to Italy the Goths would no longer fight on behalf of Totila. One would like to think that love played some part in what was obviously a prudential marriage.[13] Germanus set to work organizing a large force, but before he was able to advance on Italy he fell ill and died. By that time Matasuentha was pregnant, carrying a child in whose veins would run blood of both Roman and Gothic royal families. He would be named Germanus, after his father.

The death of Germanus was a blow, but it made no difference to Justinian's determination to finish the Italian war. The Armenian Narses, who had already had a record of loyal service, was appointed to take over the expedition, and enormous financial resources, such as would allow him to raise a huge army, make up arrears in the pay of the soldiers already in Italy, and seek to win the loyalty of troops who had defected to Totila, were placed at his disposal. He was not, however, given a title, so our sources describe him in vague terms such as 'commander-in-chief' and 'general'. Rather than sailing, Narses chose to march overland, at the head of a huge force which included 5500 unruly Lombards. Among the Romans was Artabanes, who had been restored to favour. In the spring of 552 he left Salona, entering Ravenna in June at the head of

13. As we have seen, in 538 there had been talk of a marriage between Matasuentha and John, the nephew of Vitalian; in 545 John married Germanus' daughter Justina. The marriage of Germanus and Matasuentha a few years later gives one the feeling of how limited the number of really desirable spouses was.

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an army of some 30 000. It was beyond the power of the Gothic army, weakened by years of fighting, to resist such a force. In 551 Totila, in a display of bravado, had ravaged the coasts of Greece, but such acts could do nothing to change the situation. Narses moved quickly. Late in June or early in July the armies met at Busta Gallorum, a site in the Apennines. Hitherto the war had mainly been fought by siege and skirmish, but now, when the opposing armies were drawn up for a decisive battle, it was clear that the Goths were hopelessly outnumbered. They fought with valour and their king displayed heroism, but were overwhelmed by their opponents. We are told that 6000 Gothic troops were killed. Totila died of a wound sustained in the battle, and the war was effectively over.

There was still mopping-up to be done, but before seeing to this Narses dismissed his Lombard allies, whose wild behaviour could not be controlled. Rome was occupied, and at the end of October a Gothic army was defeated at Mons Lactarius, a site in the south of Italy. Narses allowed the survivors to return to their own lands and become subjects of the emperor.[14] Some hostile Goths were still ensconced in strong points, and the Franks took advantage of the demise of the Gothic state to launch a major expedition which had to be dealt with. Justinian only received the keys of Verona and Brescia from Narses in November 562, but we may take the battle of Busta Gallorum as marking the end of substantial Gothic resistance. In this fashion the Gothic period of Italian history came to a definitive end. The extensive properties of the Arian religious establishment of Ravenna passed to the Catholic church, and the Arian churches of the town were turned over to the Catholic cult and rededicated, to saints of largely eastern and anti-Arian orientation. It is a small detail, but the rededications left no doubt as to the direction Italy's new rulers saw it as taking.

One more expedition rounded off the western wars. In 551 a member of a noble Visigothic family, Athanagild, sought to

14. Agathias 1.1.1 (*Histories* ed. R. Keydell, Berlin 1968; trans. Joseph D. Freudo, Berlin/New York 1975), whose testimony is to be preferred to the claim of Procopius that the surviving Goths were allowed to leave Italy forthwith (*Wars* 8.35.33–6 ed. and trans. H.B. Dewing, London 1914–1940). Many Goths continued to live in Italy, as can be deduced from the correspondence of pope Gregory the Great (590–604), which refers to many bearers of Gothic names.

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enlist the aid of Justinian in a revolt against the king, and in the summer of the following year the emperor despatched a force under the command of the patrician Liberius to Spain. This man had begun his career in his native Italy under king Odovacer, and given that Odovacer had died in 493 his appointment to a command as late as 552 is surprising. Indeed, he had been recalled from an expedition to Italy not long before on the grounds that he was ἐσχατογέρων ('in extreme old age', Procopius *Wars* 7.39.7). The expedition made useful gains in Spain, but in 555 Athanagild became king and asked the imperial forces to withdraw. This they refused to do, and Justinian was left holding a slice of coastal territory which included Cartagena and Malaga, but did not extend far inland.[15] A mint was established which continued to issue coins until the reign of Heraclius in the seventh century. Hence the Spanish expedition, unlike those directed against Africa and Italy, failed to topple the barbarian state into whose territory it had been directed. But this may not have been the aim of Liberius' mission. As we have seen, the Visigoths offered a threat to Africa, and Justinian may have been merely erecting a defensive barrier along the Spanish coast nearest to Africa. In any case, the Spanish expedition was the final touch to an impressive re-drawing of the political map of the Mediterranean, at the end of which, a poet observed, a traveller could go as far as the sandy shore of Spain where the Pillars of Hercules lay and still be in imperial territory.[16]

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THE WEST AFTER THE WARS

Yet the fruits of success were bitter for the West. The Italians who had been sitting out the latter stages of the war in Constantinople set off for home. Pope Vigilius left in 555, although he died before arriving in Rome. Cethegus retired, to estates in Sicily rather than Rome, while Cassiodorus founded a monastery in Bruttium. His foundation, Vivarium, boasted a fine library, and in some ways the community Cassiodorus established there marked the fruition of a plan to found a centre for Christian higher studies in Rome which

15. E.A. Thomson *The Goths in Spain* Oxford 1969 pp. 320–3.
16. Agathias, in *Greek Anthology* 4.3.83ff (ed. W.R. Paton, London 1931).

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he had talked over with pope Agapetus in happier times. In those days he had planned to imitate the kind of school which had formerly existed in Alexandria and which in his own time flourished in Nisibis.[17] But no-one would have thought of founding such an institution in Rome after the war. Many of its most distinguished inhabitants had been killed, and the countryside which produced the wealth necessary to sustain the activities which had flourished there under the Goths had been devastated.

How could the Italians not have felt unhappy? Thanks to the long war Justinian had launched, their land was in a terrible state. Cities had lost their populations, and the rural economy had been devastated, with the landowning aristocracy, which had flourished under the Goths, being left to contemplate the ruin of its estates. Pope Pelagius I (555–561) wrote to Gaul and Africa seeking financial help. Moreover, the restoration of Italy to the empire had not been accompanied by a restoration to the position it had enjoyed prior to 476. No emperor ruled from Ravenna, still less from Rome. Important posts of the empire in the West which had been maintained under the Ostrogoths, such as the master of the offices and quaestor, simply lapsed. Those which were not dependent on the presence of the sovereign continued to be filled, but often not by Italians. While the first two praetorian prefects appointed by Belisarius were natives respectively of Milan and Rome, later appointees were career men sent from Constantinople. One of them, Athanasius, was successively praetorian prefect of Italy and praetorian prefect of Africa, and indeed the administration of Africa, no less than that of Italy, came to resemble that of a branch office in which the upper echelons were filled by Greek speakers reporting to headquarters by the Bosphorus. Until he was recalled in 568, supreme power in Italy was in the hands of Narses, an Armenian who is not known to have held a formal title and is described in dark terms by Italian sources. The contrast with the administration of Egypt, which, as we shall see, was for practical purposes in the hands of wealthy indigenous landowners, could not be more clear. Increasingly, Italians occupying positions of leadership were to be found among the bishops, but even this was not necessarily an area of local autonomy,

17. Cassiodorus *Institutiones* 1 praef. 1 (ed. R.A.B. Mynors, Oxford 1937).

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for as we shall see, key members of the episcopate were often appointed by Justinian.

The clearest sign of the state of Italy after the war comes from the Pragmatic Sanction Justinian issued to regulate its life in August 554. The conclusion of the Vandal war was followed by the enactment in 534 of precise and detailed legislation concerning the governance of the newly won territories in Africa, but nothing on a similar scale followed the Gothic war, and the Pragmatic Sanction has a feeling of the *ad hoc* about it.[18] While it deals with important issues such as the ownership of land, there is no attempt to recast the government, such as had happened after the victory over the Vandals in Africa; the status of Narses, for example, is not touched on. There were no celebrations when the drawn-out war against the Goths was finally brought to a conclusion. Indeed, far from pulling Italy out of the barbarian West, the wars of Justinian were to implicate it there more deeply: the lingering presence of the Franks, something unthinkable in the Ostrogothic period, was ominous, but of more importance was the presence of so many barbarian soldiers in the army led by Narses. Among them were Lombards, who were to return *en masse* not long after the defeat of the Goths, and it was to prove impossible to dislodge them.

The impact of the war on the intellectual life of Italy was also grim. Cassiodorus' first surviving work was a collection of letters written on behalf of the Ostrogothic sovereigns, some of them bursting with delightfully recondite pieces of information; his last was a book on how to spell. Contrary to what might have been anticipated, the war failed to integrate the conquered lands into the thought-world of the wider empire: in the library Cassiodorus established in his monastery at Vivarium the books in Greek were relegated to an eighth bookcase, and oddly enough the Byzantine conquest of Italy seems to have been followed by a decline in Greek scholarship in Italy. As we shall see, by the middle of the sixth century the centre of Latin literary culture was Constantinople, and it is possible that the hostile western response to a major theological initiative undertaken by Justinian during the 540s and

18. The study of G.G. Archi, 'Pragmatica Sanctio pro petitione Vigili' *Festschrift für Franz Wieacker* Göttingen 1978: 11–36, is a good example of the light historians of law can cast on non-legal issues.

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early 550s can be interpreted as betraying uneasiness as to the situation of the West.

It may well be, then, that after the war the inhabitants of the conquered territories looked with less favour on the empire than they had before they were a part of it. In the same way, it has been plausibly suggested that the inhabitants of the East became increasingly aware of the differences between themselves and westerners in the years of war.[19] Paradoxically, then, far from healing the split between the eastern empire and its lost western territories, the wars of Justinian may have tended to drive them apart.

But if we wish to get the feel of at least some of the aspirations of the ruling class in Italy towards the end of the Gothic war, we can do no better than consider the famous mosaics in the church of S Vitale at Ravenna, where two exquisite works depicting processions were executed in the sanctuary in about 547.[20] One, flanking on the right the figure of Christ which is depicted in another mosaic in the apse of the church, has two deacons at its head, the first carrying a thurible and the second a gospel book. They are followed by a bishop identified by an inscription as Maximianus, a lay person who cannot be securely identified, and Justinian. Thereafter come two court officials and finally a group of soldiers, apparently bodyguards. The figures are located in a space devoid of characteristics which would define it, but various details, such as the movement of the left hand and foot of the figure furthest to the right, who seems in the act of moving outside the scene, show that they are to be understood as moving towards the right. Facing this mosaic is another on the women's side of the church which shows two court officials leading Theodora, who is followed by a group of splendidly

19. Maria Cesa 'La Politica di Giustiniano verso l'occidente nel giudizio di Procopio' *Athenaeum* 59 1981: 389–409.
20. Of the large amount of writing on this subject I have found most helpful G. Rodenwaldt 'Bemerkungen zu den Kaisermosaiken San Vitale' *Jahrbuch des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts* 59f 1944f: 88–110, and F. W. Deichmann *Ravenna, Haupstadt des Spätantiken Abendlandes* Wiesbaden 1958–76, vol. 1 pp. 220–56, vol. 2/2 pp. 47–230, which is noteworthy for its illustrations as well as its detailed commentary. Otto G. Von Simson *Sacred Fortress* Chicago 1948 is interesting, but the interpretation seems to me fanciful, as does that of E. Manara 'Di un ipotesi per l'individuazione dei personaggi nei pannelli del S. Vitale a Ravenna e per la loro interpretazione' *Felix Ravenna* 125f 1983: 13–37.

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attired women; there are no explicitly religious figures in this procession. Here the figures are clearly moving towards the left, and seem to be about to enter a building, outside which there is a small fountain, through a curtained entrance. In accordance with convention, the main figures in the mosaics, although shown moving in such a way as would make only the profiles of their faces visible to beholders, are shown looking directly out at the beholder; in each case the figures are moving in the direction of the altar of the church.

The identity of the most important person in each mosaic may seem clear. In the former, Justinian occupies a central position. He wears a distinctive purple chlamys with a rich tablion, fastened over his right shoulder by an extraordinarily rich brooch, from which hang jewels.[21] On his head is a diadem, on his feet low shoes. Around his head is a nimbus, and he appears to be the only figure in the mosaic not partly obscured by a neighbour. For her part, Theodora, while not occupying a central position, is distinguished by being the tallest person in the scene, although she is known to have been a person short in stature, is wearing a purple robe over a white dress with a golden fringe, has a nimbus, and stands beneath a canopy.

But there is an alternative way of interpreting the scene of which Justinian is a part which it will be worth our while examining. If the group of soldiers at the end is taken away from the scene, and it is clear from the low competence of the mosaicist responsible for their faces that they were regarded as the least important people in the composition, Justinian and Maximianus can be seen as jointly the most important. It is true that the unidentified lay person between them occupies the central place, but he is a figure of no importance, whose body disappears below his chest: there is no sign of him in the space between the clothing of Justinian and that of Maximianus, while he has no feet. Not only do the emperor and the bishop become central in the composition of the mosaic, but each can be seen as having two lesser individuals, respectively

21. Interesting in this connection is a passage from Corippus describing the clothing of Justin II prior to his coronation: it included a clasp from which hung jewels gained by victory in the Gothic war and which Ravenna had conveyed, as well as some which Belisarius had carried away from the Vandal court (*In Laudem Justini Augusti minoris* 2.123–5 ed. and trans. Averil Cameron, London 1976).

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secular officials and junior clergy, between himself and the margin of the composition. Indeed, each seems to stand at the head of a line of people: to the left of Justinian the left side of the body of each figure is blocked by the figure to the right, while to the right of Maximianus the reverse is true. Emperor and bishop both wear brightly coloured and distinctive clothing, Justinian a chlamys and Maximianus a pallium, and they make almost identical gestures with their arms. Further, while Justinian's left arm obtrudes in front of the bishop, the latter's cloak comes dangerously near to blocking the lowest part of the imperial chlamys, and Maximianus, with his two deacons, stands further into the foreground than do the others in the scene. Finally, Maximianus is the only figure whose name the mosaic supplies. There are, then, reasons for seeing emperor and bishop as being equally weighted, or indeed for Maximianus as being seen as marginally the more important.

The solemnity of the scenes, and the overt ecclesiastical nature of one of them, suggests that they have some religious significance. Each depicts a procession in which an imperial personage carries a vessel, a round dish with a raised rim in the case of Justinian and a capacious chalice in the case of Theodora. In other words, they are carrying the vessels used to hold the bread and wine used in the sacrament of the Eucharist. Scholars have debated as to whether they are to be seen as participating in one of the processions of the Orthodox liturgy, and it is certainly interesting that the first clear reference to something like the Great Entrance of the Orthodox liturgy occurs in a document of just this time. But this is not the only context in which such processions could be seen. Some decades earlier the emperor Justin had presented S Peter's in Rome with a paten and chalice, each made of gold, and it is possible that the mosaics are meant to suggest the presentation of similar gifts to the church of S Vitale in a procession of a kind which would have occurred had the imperial couple ever visited Italy. The theme of the offering of gifts is taken up in a design embroidered on the bottom of Theodora's cloak, which shows the three Magi carrying the gifts they were to present to the infant Jesus, a eucharistic theme to be found in other mosaics in the church, which depict Abel, Melchizedek and Abraham, three figures from the book of Genesis whose offerings were pleasing to God.

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Nevertheless, it would be going too far to argue that the mosaics were designed to convey any ideological message devised by the emperor. There is no reason to see in them an imperially sponsored statement of victory in the Gothic war, which was still to be won when the mosaics were installed, still less any covert reference to the Arianism of the Goths. Of course their content, particularly in the mosaic including Justinian, is Christian, even down to the monogram made up of the superimposed Greek letters XP (chi and rho), which occurs on the shield held in front of the members of the bodyguard, these being the first two letters in the word 'Christ'. But this does not mean that the soldiers were meant to represent an orthodox army fighting heretical Arians: they have much more the look of the imperial bodyguard. Any statement the mosaic was intended to convey may have been episcopally rather than imperially inspired. Bishop Maximianus had recently been in Constantinople, having been consecrated there by pope Vigilius in October 546, and he may have brought back from the royal city the idea for the mosaics, and perhaps rough plans for the imperial portraits. Nevertheless, the importance given the bishop in one of the mosaics could be held to suggest that episcopal rather than imperial inspiration lay behind them. Maximianus, who came from Pola, a coastal town in the south of Istria, was not a native of Ravenna, and, like so many of those who held power in post-conquest Italy, he owed his appointment to the favour of Justinian. It is possible that the assertion of his own position governed the composition of the mosaic as much as a desire to make a statement about the emperor and his consort. If this is so, the work answers to the needs of the imperially imposed hierarchy which found itself in power after the armies of Justinian had allegedly restored freedom to Italy. But this raises issues which it will be better to consider in the context of ecclesiastical affairs.

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Chapter 5

THE CHURCH

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THE CHRISTIAN EMPIRE

No century has seen greater change in the role played by the Christian church in society than the fourth. In 303 the last of the great persecutions began, but the tide turned decisively during the reign of the first Christian emperor, Constantine (306–337), and by the end of the century the pagan temples were closed and sacrifices prohibited. The progress of the Christian religion from being the victim of state-sponsored persecution to definitive triumph had occurred comfortably within the span of two generations. It is true that pockets of paganism displayed disquieting resilience and that Judaism remained a tolerated faith, but the status of Christianity as the religion of the state had become overwhelmingly secure long before the reign of Justinian.

This, however, was not the end of its development. As time passed the Christian religion continued to become more central to the life of the empire, the cities of which steadily took on a more ecclesiastical character. Constantine is known to have built only two or three churches in Constantinople, and a document of 425 indicates the presence in the city of fourteen churches, although it certainly errs on the low side. But Justinian is reported to have built or rebuilt thirty-three churches in the city and its suburbs. At Philippi two large basilicas were built in around 500, an octagonal church followed shortly afterwards, while by 540 a larger church had been erected. The chronology of the building of churches in

Syria is particularly interesting.[1] At Gerasa, the modern Jerash, the urban site continued to be dominated by pagan temples, but despite a general economic decline it came to be well catered for by churches, largely built out of the stones of the temples. By the time of the Arab conquest in about 636 the town was served by eleven places of Christian worship. The cathedral had been erected in the fourth century and two further churches in the second half of the fifth century, but the great boom occurred in the sixth century when seven churches, among them those containing the most impressive mosaics in the town, were erected, while the last church was built early in the seventh century. At Rihab, some 25 kilometres to the east, the boom in building came later: inscriptions indicate that the churches on the site were built during the period 533–635.

The rise in the number of churches was not an unmixed blessing, however, for people were more prepared to gain prestige by erecting buildings than to pay for their staffing and upkeep. The Great Church in Constantinople found it difficult to pay its large staff (see above p. 52). By the time of Justinian its 40 deaconesses, women who had to be no less than 40 years old and married only once, may have been anomalous, but neither can the male members of its enormous clerical establishment have been overworked. They constituted a drain on the resources of the Great Church, and the burden of large numbers of clergy may have been common; early in the sixth century the church of Antioch was so heavily in debt that the patriarch was reluctant to carry out further ordinations. But despite their expenses, the churches enjoyed substantial assets. The Great Church controlled 1100 workshops or small businesses, and the wealth of the society was increasingly finding its way towards religious institutions; an early piece of Justinian's legislation deals with the problem caused by the many people who left wills simply naming Jesus Christ as heir (Codex 1.2.25). Doubtless not all the citizens of the empire were this pious. In 546 a law threatened actors who dressed up as monks, nuns or ascetics with bodily punishment and exile (novel 123.44). But there can be no mistaking the

1. For Gerasa, C.H. Kraeling ed. *Gerasa City of the Decapolis* New Haven Conn. 1938 remains the standard treatment; for Rihab, I follow M. Piccirillo *Chiesi e mosaici della Giordania settentrionale* Jerusalem 1981.

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importance of religion in the empire, and its continuing growth.

One pointer to this was the rising power bishops enjoyed in their cities. To an extent this was a consequence of the episcopate's expanding its functions to fill the vacuum created by the atrophy of town councils in late antiquity. But in the sixth century we find bishops discharging an extraordinary variety of functions. In the 530s the loyalty of the bishop of Rome was of concern to both sides in the Gothic war, and in the 540s it was taken for granted that bishops could treat with invading Persians on behalf of their towns. The Pragmatic Sanction that Justinian issued in 554 gave local bishops as well as leading secular persons the power to nominate provincial governors in Italy, and gave the pope and the senate authority to regulate the weights and measures used by the tradespeople of Rome. Justinian's legislation authorizes bishops not only to carry out such pastoral tasks as visiting prisoners on Wednesdays or Fridays (Codex 1.4.22) and helping actresses who sought to leave the stage (Codex 5.4.29), but to report officials who were lax in enforcing the laws against heretics to him (Codex 1.5.18.12), and bishops were among those enjoined to keep an eye on the administration of local affairs (Codex 1.4.26). It is not surprising that stories were told in Egypt that Justinian tried to induce a patriarch of Alexandria to support his theological line with the promise that he would be governor as well as patriarch, and when the Arabs invaded Egypt in 640 they found that the one man, Cyrus, was both patriarch and governor.

But the Christian religion was far more than a cult performed in impressive buildings and a source of administrative talent. Since the time of Constantine emperors had believed that its correct practice would assure the good-will of God towards the state. The belief was given forceful expression in the Henotikon which Zeno issued in 482: as long as Christ approved and accepted the praise and service rendered by the empire, the power of its enemies would be swept away, and peace with its blessings, favourable temperature, abundant produce, and all beneficial things would be forthcoming. As did many people in late antiquity and the middle ages, Justinian placed great faith in the prayers of monks. If they prayed for the state with pure hands and naked souls, he was sure that the army would enjoy peace, the cities would enjoy tranquillity,

the earth would produce its fruits, and there would be plenty of seafood as well (novel 133.5).

For the Byzantines, then, Christianity was a religion harnessed to the purposes of the state. Justinian felt that the two greatest gifts for which the kindness of God were responsible were the priesthood and the imperial power, and that if both carried out their functions properly there would be harmony (novel 6pr.; the word συμφωνία is that which Procopius used to describe the relationship between the component parts of Hagia Sophia). In some respects, his doctrine of the priesthood was a high one. He accepted that the pope was the first of all bishops, followed by the 'most holy archbishop of Constantinople, the new Rome' (novel 131.2). But, to express the relationship in terms which may not have occurred to people in the sixth century, the harmony he sought involved a high level of state interference in church affairs. Justinian felt it was within his competence to forbid the clergy to play board games, or to legislate concerning the election of abbots and abbesses. Personal qualities and the support of other members of the monastery or convent were to be sought rather than seniority, and the local bishop had to approve. He also issued a law stating that monks were to sleep in dormitories. These principles were obviously sensible, and had much in common with those enunciated at almost the same time by S Benedict in Italy, so much so that some scholars have unwisely suggested that one legislator influenced the other. But whereas Benedict was a monk writing a personal document of no official status, the issues he dealt with were the subject of legislation by the state in the empire.

Justinian's concern for the maintenance of correct doctrine and proper standards was therefore partly a matter of state. But he was concerned with more than this. He was a devout and sincere believer, who thought that intervention of two saints had once saved him from a serious illness, and that on another occasion he had been healed from an ailment, which rigorous fasting had worsened, by the application of the relics of forty martyrs. While the legal code issued by Theodosius II in 438 concluded with a statement of belief, the code of Justinian opened with one, and as we have seen the steps he took against pagans and Jews at the beginning of his reign represented a hardening of official policy. Further, he insisted that the canons of the ecumenical councils of the church were

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to be considered as laws of the empire, so that this part of the law of the church was incorporated into the law of the state. He wrote various works expressing his convictions, the first emperor to do so since Julian the apostate, and it is possible that he was the author of a hymn, 'O only-begotten Word and Son', which is sung to this day.[2] There can be no mistaking his conviction.

. . .

THE SEARCH FOR SOUND DOCTRINE

Virtually since its foundation, the adherents of the Christian religion had been engrossed in controversies over doctrine. Many of these arose out of attempts to express the teachings of their faith in accordance with philosophical understandings which had arisen among the Greeks. In principle this was an excellent idea, and over the centuries Christian thinkers have found it useful to appropriate Greek terminology and concepts, such as those of 'substance' and 'nature', to help elucidate their concerns. But in practice the operation turned out to be awkward. It was difficult to make Greek concepts fit the data of the Bible, by and large the product of a very different thought-world. To make matters worse, Christian thinkers were prepared to defend their ideas and attack those of others with a doggedness not often found among pagan intellectuals. And as the church became more important in society, the temptation to use divergent theological understandings in struggles for power became stronger. From the time of the emperor Constantine the holding of correct doctrine became a concern of the state, as the government became concerned with matters of doctrine to a degree rarely found among Christian states of the West. And so the stage was set for the controversies which followed.

The focal point for disagreement was the status of Jesus of Nazareth. Almost everyone agreed that he was both God and a human being. Yet surely these two categories were mutually exclusive. Early in the fifth century Nestorios, a theologian from Antioch who became patriarch of Constantinople (428–431), tried to deal with the question by positing a Christ in whom the divine and human elements were quite separate.

2. V. Grumel 'L'Auteur et la date de composition du tropaire 'O Μονογενὴς' *Echos d'Orient* 22 1923: 398–418.

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For this reason he held that it was improper to refer to the Virgin Mary as one who had given birth to God; rather, she had merely given birth to a man, Christ's divine characteristics having come from the Father. It seemed to most people that this way of looking at things created too wide a gulf between the divine and human aspects of Jesus, and the teaching of Nestorios was condemned by the Council of Ephesos (431), which taught that Mary was truly 'Theotokos', a word which is often translated 'Mother of God' but should more accurately be rendered 'God-bearer'. In using it the council was not, in the first place, making a statement about Mary; rather, by asserting that she gave birth to Jesus as God as well as Jesus as a human being, it was expressing the closeness of the relation between the divine and human components of the individual, Jesus.

Some, however, thought that the council had not gone far enough. A school arose which taught that the divine and human aspects of Jesus were bound together so closely as to constitute a unity. Among those thinking in this way was Eutyches, a monk of Constantinople, but the most important exponent of the view was Cyril, patriarch of Alexandria (412–444). But if this were granted, surely it could be said that Christ had only one nature. So there developed the understanding later called 'Monophysite', or 'one nature,' which it is convenient to refer to by this title from its beginning. Not all were persuaded by this teaching. Its opponents included pope Leo I (440–461), and after some abortive preliminaries a council met in 451 at Chalcedon, just across the Bosphorus from Constantinople, to consider the issue. It expressed its condemnation of the Monophysite position in precise terminology which owed something to Greek philosophy and something to an eastern Christian fondness for expressing understandings in negative terms: Christ was to be acknowledged as one person in two natures 'without confusion, without change, without division, without separation'.

But neither the council of Ephesos nor that of Chalcedon was universally accepted. The opponents of the former, a group generally referred to as Nestorians, tended to live in territories under Persian power, and hence their opposition was of little concern to the empire. The Monophysites were a very different kettle of fish. Their theologians in the period after Chalcedon were superior to those who supported the

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council, and they were able to argue, against the Chalcedonian formulation of 'in two natures', that Christ could be more accurately described as 'of two natures', which would allow them to predicate 'one nature of the incarnate word'. It is tempting to see such disputes as nothing more than frivolous games of intellectual football, but Justinian took them very seriously. While a concern with church affairs was common among emperors, Anastasius having been spoken of as a potential bishop of Antioch, the dogged persistence with which Justinian devoted himself to church affairs is remarkable. Adherence to the council of Chalcedon was strongest in the West, and it may be that Justinian's western origin was connected with his commitment to its teaching. But he found himself opposed by most of the inhabitants of Egypt, and many of those of Syria, who were of the Monophysite persuasion. Moreover, the ecclesiastical politics of Egypt and Syria were notorious for the vigour with which they were conducted.

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EGYPT

Egyptians had a history of taking their theology remarkably seriously. In 415 a crowd of monks had murdered Hypatia, a well-known pagan intellectual, although their implements were probably tiles rather than the oyster shells which they have sometimes been thought to have used.[3] Supporters of the council of Chalcedon believed that in 507 unclean spirits had taken possession of the people of Alexandria and all Egypt, so that they began to bark like dogs and ate their hands and arms. In 457 the bishop of Alexandria was lynched in his cathedral while celebrating the eucharist on Maundy Thursday, and neither of his successors was able to impose himself on the patriarchal throne. More relaxed views prevailed in Syria, but even here successive patriarchs of Antioch were murdered, deposed and banished. Some scholars have seen the enthusiastic acceptance of Monophysitism in Egypt and Syria as an expression of national identity *vis-à-vis* Constantinople. There is no need to accept this hypothesis, but there

3. As by Gibbon, in a memorable passage (*The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* ed. J.B. Bury 5 London 1898 p. 110).

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can be no doubt that Egypt, in particular, was a region to be treated with care.

Indeed, Egypt was an exasperating land. Its capital, the mighty city of Alexandria, had been founded by Alexander the Great in 331 BC on a site ideally located for trade, for it stood at the junction of routes linking the Mediterranean, the Indian Ocean and large parts of Africa. Roughly midway between Sri Lanka, then a key trading centre, and Britain, it was home to such people as the merchant Kosmas Indicopleustes, who sailed down the Red Sea and claimed to have gone as far as Sri Lanka. It was certainly better located for trade than Constantinople, which Alexandrians could look down on as a young upstart. Their city was famous for its imposing buildings, while the great lighthouse on the island of Pharos was one of the wonders of the world. A large and alert Jewish community lived there, it being in Alexandria that the Septuagint, the standard translation of the Old Testament into Greek, had been prepared, while the city produced an unfailing stream of Christian heresies. But Egypt owed its importance in the time of Justinian to another reason. The inhabitants of Constantinople, a large city in the midst of fairly poor agricultural land, depended on imported grain. Bread was then the basic food of the Mediterranean region to a far greater extent than today, and the average person probably ate several pounds of it each day. So it was that the harvests which were so bountiful along the Nile valley supplied the want of the royal city. Every year the 'happy shipment' of grain saw perhaps a tenth of the Egyptian crop conveyed to the docks of Constantinople, in sufficient quantity, it has been estimated, to have fed 600 000 people.[4]

By and large, the government was prepared to let Egypt go its own way as long as the grain shipments and taxes were forthcoming. No emperor since Diocletian had set foot there, and in the remarkably short section devoted to Egypt in his *Buildings*, Procopius only gives Justinian credit for one work; significantly, it was to do with the storage of grain (6.1.1–5). As far as we can tell from the surviving fragmentary evidence, the administration was almost entirely conducted by native Egyptian landowners at all levels except for the topmost office, that of praefectus augustalis. Power was in the hands of

4. A.H.M. Jones *The Later Roman Empire 284–602* Oxford 1964 p. 698.

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wealthy, self-regarding landowners such as the egregiously named Fl. Marianus Michaelius Gabrielius Sergius Bacchus Narses Conon Anastasius Domninus Theodorus Callinicus. Another Egyptian, Fl. Ioannes Theodorus Menas Chnoubammon Horion Hephaestus, went to Constantinople where it was believed that he was a descendent of Hephaestus, the first king of Egypt. The confident names betray no sign of the breakdown of the traditional system of Roman names which was then occurring in Italy, where increasingly people were being known by just one name. The native-born heads of the Egyptian church, the patriarchs of Alexandria, were feared for their ambition, and referred to as pharaohs by others. While the adoption of Christianity had given Egypt a religion held in common with the rest of the empire, the concomitant rise of the Coptic language meant that for the Egyptians, as for the Armenians and Goths, Christianity came to encourage a specifically local form of written culture. But what sane emperor would wish to intervene in the ecclesiastical affairs of Egypt? Precedents were not encouraging: in the fourth century emperors had deposed and banished the intransigent patriarch Athanasius, the great opponent of the teaching of Arius, five times, but he had the last laugh. Surely it was best to have as little as possible to do with Egypt.

Justinian found himself in a difficult position. There were good reasons for generosity towards the Monophysites, particularly those of Egypt. Yet any move towards weakening the formulations of the council of Chalcedon would have been contrary to his personal inclinations and, conceivably, would bring the wrath of God on the empire. Further, such a move would be strongly opposed. From the time of pope Leo the Great the papacy had been unswervingly committed to the defence of the Chalcedonian position, and the entire western church was of one mind, even if it was not an educated mind. The success of the wars in the West made western opinion less easy for Justinian to ignore. There were also influential circles in Constantinople committed to the council of Chalcedon, among which the family of Juliana Anicia was prominent. Yet the family of the former emperor Anastasius, which retained a degree of influence throughout the reign of Justinian, was of the contrary persuasion, as was the empress. It was small wonder that Justinian's policy, while firm in its principles, tended to wobble in its execution. The imposition of a formu-

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la which sought to mediate between different theological understandings, the appointment of apparently pliable figures to high office in the church, the kidnapping and browbeating of a pope and the calling of an ecumenical council were among the expedients Justinian adopted. Ultimately, all were in vain.

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THE SEARCH FOR COMPROMISE

In 482 Zeno, advised by the patriarch Acacius, issued his Henotikon which attempted to solve the matter by observing that there is in Christ one person. But the pope reacted in a hostile fashion, and the Acacian schism between the churches of Rome and Constantinople began. Not for the last time, an imperial manoeuvre aimed at reconciliation was a cause of division. The following emperor, Anastasius, was a Monophysite sympathizer, and a tide began to flow which led to the most competent theologian among the Monophysites, Severus, becoming patriarch of Antioch in 512. But the coming to power in 518 of Justin, a staunch adherent of the council of Chalcedon, was a triumph for that side. In the following year communion with the church of Rome was re-established, and the emperors Zeno and Anastasius anathematized. Before long Monophysite bishops were being deposed. Some found their way to Egypt, where no attempt was made to move against them. Among them was Severus, who found it impossible to hold his ground in Antioch.

Nevertheless, the new government's actions were not entirely to papal liking. In September 518 Justinian wrote an imperious letter to pope Hormisdas informing him that he was anticipating the pope's arrival in Constantinople without any delay, an ominous straw in the wind, but Hormisdas stayed in Rome. The patriarch of Constantinople used language in his dealings with the pope which was calculated to enhance the standing of his see, and he seems to have been the first occupant of it to have adopted the title 'ecumenical patriarch', the use of which was to create problems in relations between the sees of Rome and Constantinople towards the end of the century. Further, contrary to papal hopes, the government did not go out of its way to antagonize Monophysite opinion, refusing to depose all the bishops to whom Rome objected.

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To make matters worse, Justinian became aware of a formula which he hoped would reconcile the adherents of the council of Chalcedon with the Monophysites: 'one of the Trinity suffered in the flesh'. This doctrine, technically termed Theopaschitism (from the Greek for 'God suffered'), may seem tendentious, but arguably it is inherent in the Nicene creed, given its teaching that 'Jesus Christ ... very God of very God ... became man and was crucified'. Justinian took these words at face value: the one who was 'very God' was the one who was crucified, for when the creed spoke of his becoming man it did not mean that he stopped being one thing and was turned into something else, but rather that he remained God when he assumed humanity. But not all were convinced. When Justinian put pressure on pope Hormisdas to accept the formula, the pope equivocated for as long as he could before coming down against it. Not for the last time, however, Justinian decided to proceed regardless of what Hormisdas or anyone else thought.

In 532 he arranged for conversations to be held in the royal city between Chalcedonian and Monophysite theologians. Their dialogue had no lasting result, and was chiefly noteworthy for the latter group producing a work which they said had been written by Dionysios the Areopagite, an Athenian converted by S Paul. This is a very early reference to the writings of the unknown Neoplatonist scholars now referred to as the pseudo-Dionysios. Its authenticity was shrewdly queried by the chairperson of the discussions, bishop Hypatius of Ephesos, who was certainly correct to see it as spurious. But Justinian was sufficiently encouraged by the meeting to issue an edict in the following year addressed to the inhabitants of thirteen cities and towns. None of them was in Egypt, however; it is clear that Justinian's strategy was to bring the supporters of Chalcedonian to a position from which reconciliation with the Monophysites would be possible. While the edict reaffirmed adherence to the council of Chalcedon and condemned the teachings of Nestorios and Eutyches, it made no mention of the nature or natures of Christ, and could therefore be said to have tiptoed around the central issue which divided Chalcedonians and Monophysites. A team was sent to Rome, led by bishop Hypatius. The pope, John II, had recently assumed office in difficult circumstances, and he was not the man to make difficulties. The generous gifts which Justinian

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prudently sent may have made the imperial argument seem more compelling. In any case, John retreated from the ground Hormisdas had occupied, and accepted a form of words remarkably close to a Theopaschite position. A fulsome exchange of correspondence took place between emperor and pope, which Justinian placed towards the beginning of the Codex, promulgated in November 534. His plans were maturing well.

In June 535 a new patriarch of Constantinople, Anthemius, was appointed. A famous ascetic, who was said never to have eaten bread or drunk wine, he had been one of the Chalcedonian theologians in the discussions of 532, but before long he revealed himself as a Monophysite. A few months earlier the patriarch of Alexandria had died, and his replacement, Theodosius, was a friend of Severus. People thought that the hand of Theodora could be detected behind both appointments. She certainly gave help when Theodosius found it difficult to secure his position: 6000 troops commanded by Narses were despatched to Alexandria. Oddly enough this may have weakened the position of Theodosius, who could now be seen as an imperial lackey. But when the veteran Severus turned up in Constantinople it must have seemed that the triumph of an imperially sponsored moderate line was at hand.

Against this background pope Agapetus, who had succeeded John in May 535, arrived in Constantinople in late February or early March 536. As we have seen, he had been sent to conduct an embassy on behalf of the Ostrogoth Theodahad, but he had his own agenda, and was determined to strike at recent developments. The pope declined to enter into communion with the patriarch, and before long not only Justinian but also Theodora, usually an ally of Monophysite clergy, had turned against him.[5] Anthemius was deposed and Agapetus had the satisfaction of consecrating his successor, Menas. Having achieved nothing on Theodahad's behalf, Agapetus was in no hurry to return home, and died in Constantinople in April. Not all mourned him. The pope's sojourn in the royal city had given no joy to the Monophysites. They later recalled that his entrance had been accompanied

5. W. Ensslin, 'Papst Agapet I und Kaiser Justinian I.' *Historisches Jahrbuch* 77 1958: 459–66 at 462 n. 30. But I know of no study which brings out the complexities of the mission of Agapetus.

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by an earthquake and a dimming of the sun and moon, while his death was attributed to a curse from a Monophysite holy man: the pope's tongue grew so long that it hung down over his breast, and after suffering for several days he died. Such stories bear the hallmarks of emanating from a persecuted community, and they were easily told, for these events marked the beginning of a decline in the fortunes of the Monophysites.

Later in the year a council was held which excommunicated and banished Severus and Anthemius, and ordered that books written by the former were to be burned. He retreated to the Egyptian desert where he died a few years later; a story was told that as he lay dying his doctors tried to persuade him to take a bath, but the holy man replied that since promising Christ that he would become a monk he had never looked on his body, and when he was finally prevailed upon to bathe it was with his clothes on. Anthimius, on the other hand, was able to remain in the royal city, merely retiring to a palace belonging to Theodora. Theodosius, the patriarch of Alexandria who had owed his elevation the preceding year to Justinian, was summoned to Constantinople, where he was lodged in the palace of Hormisdas and deprived of his see. His replacement, the monk Paul, was the first supporter of the council of Chalcedon to be patriarch of Alexandria for over 50 years, and had a hard road in front of him. It was thought prudent to have him consecrated in Constantinople before he set out for his see, which he was not to occupy for long. In 539 Rhodon, the augustal prefect, and he were accused of being responsible for the murder of the deacon who controlled the finances of the diocese. Justinian sent the patrician Liberius to step into Rhodon's shoes and investigate the matter at first hand. Rhodon was sent to Constantinople and beheaded, while Paul, after proceedings in which Pelagius, a Roman deacon, had been involved, was deposed and replaced by Zoilus. Meanwhile, Ephrem, an adherent of the council of Chalcedon was appointed patriarch of Antioch. So it was that in territories where many or most of the people were Monophysites there came into being a 'Melchite' church. The name, which comes from the same root as that of the biblical character Melchizedek, means 'royal', and it was applied to church officials who followed the emperor's line, but it is semitic. The people who

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used it were Monophysites who came to see the emperor's church as different from their own.

There can be no mistaking the attitude Monophysites came to adopt towards Justinian:

> This very pit of the abyss was opened again in the days of the emperor Justinian. Again that soul-destroying madness, again the torrents of lawlessness flowed in their ravines to shake the house of the faithful.[6]

But Christian groups have frequently flourished in the midst of persecution. As early as 529/530 the Monophysite bishop John of Tella, a town in east Syria, had begun to ordain to the diaconate and priesthood men from distant regions who came to him with testimonials. This was only the beginning. In 541 Justinian's Arab ally Harith the Ghassanid asked Theodora to supply him with Monophysite bishops. As Theodosius, latterly patriarch of Alexandria, was living in the royal city, it was an easy matter for him to consecrate two bishops. One of these, Theodore, was to be based at Bostra, and the other, James, was notionally bishop of Edessa. Before long James equipped himself with two assistant bishops, so that it was possible for him to consecrate additional bishops in a canonically regular fashion. He travelled incognito, and came to be called Bar 'Addai, 'the rag', from the old clothes he wore to escape detection. The underground activities of this energetic figure resulted in what contemporaries believed was the ordination of 100 000 men to the priesthood and the formation of a Monophysite hierarchy outside Egypt. The success of his strategy is evident from the survival to this day of the 'Jacobite' church which takes its name from him. But considered from the point of view of the unity of Christians, his work was disruptive. Hitherto there had been in each town one bishop, whether a supporter or an opponent of the council of Chalcedon; hereafter, in many towns there would be two bishops, one Melchite and the other Jacobite. Instead of one church within which there were two rival points of view, James created a situation in which there would be two churches.

Meanwhile, Justinian was still considering how to bring

6. Trans. K.H. Kuhn, 'A panegyric on Apollo archimandrite of the monastery of Isaac, by Stephen bishop of Heracleopeolis Magna', in *Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium* 395 (=*Scriptores Coptici* 40f), 10f. For the 'pit of the abyss' cf. Rev 9:1.

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about unity between the adherents and opponents of the council of Chalcedon, and took advice from bishop Theodore Ascidas of Caesarea. He was a controversial figure, for he was an enthusiastic supporter of the doctrines of Origen, a theologian of the third century many of whose ideas were generally held to be unorthodox.[7] Having taken counsel, in 543 or 544 Justinian published an edict which anathematized the person and works of bishop Theodore of Mopsuestia, some of the writings of bishop Theodoret of Cyrrhus, and a letter of bishop Ibas of Edessa. The edict has not survived, but the three anathemas it presumably contained were termed the Three Chapters.[8] However, this term quickly changed its meaning, and came to be understood as referring not to the propositions of the lost edict but to the person and bodies of work which it anathematized. The three condemned theologians were writers of the fifth century who were held to be of Nestorianizing tendency, and so their condemnation could be taken as a conciliatory gesture towards Monophysite opinion. As with his Theopaschite manoeuvre, Justinian was trying to find common ground. But Theodore had died in communion with the church, while Theodoret and Ibas, although their teachings had come under criticism, were accepted by the council of Chalcedon, so a move against them could be construed as an indirect attack on Chalcedon. Justinian was playing with fire.

The issuing of the edict was a high-handed act. As so often, Justinian was going his own way; it does not seem to have crossed his mind to seek the opinion of a church council, the pope, or the patriarch of Constantinople. Nevertheless, he made it clear that he expected the leaders of the church to condemn the Three Chapters. The patriarchs of Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem were prevailed upon to sign the document which Justinian placed before them, but Menas of Constantinople was only prepared to sign subject to the agreement of the Roman church. As it turned out this was not forthcoming. But Justinian was in no mood to tolerate papal opposition

7. An anti-Origenistic tendency in Justinian's policy which was evident in the 540s and 550s may have arisen from a conviction that Origenism was connected more with the important questions of Christology, or it may have represented an attempt by Theodore to cover his tracks.
8. É. Amman 'Trois chapitres (affaire des)' *Dictionairre de théologie catholique* 15 1950: 1868–1924, remains a full guide to the ensuing controversy.

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to his plans, especially when it emanated from Vigilius, who owed his position to intrigues in Constantinople. On 22 November 545, not long before Totila laid siege to Rome, the pope was arrested while celebrating the feast of the martyr S Cecilia in the church dedicated to her in Trastevere. It is one of the churches in Rome closest to the Tiber, and Vigilius was easily bundled onto a ship. After spending a long time in Sicily, he arrived in Constantinople in January 547. Initially Vigilius maintained a high line, refusing to enter into communion with Menas, who had accepted the condemnations made by Justinian. But the circumstances of his elevation to the papal throne and his failure to carry out any promises he may have made to Theodora made him vulnerable to pressure, and Justinian was in no mood to compromise. In the preceding year another persecution of pagans had broken out, and the respected Phocas, whom Justinian had appointed praetorian prefect in succession to John the Cappadocian in 532, committed suicide; Justinian ordered that he was to be buried like an ass. The pope's resistance weakened. In June he resumed communion with Menas, and after taking the advice of various bishops he issued his *Iudicatum* in April 548. Addressed to Menas, it condemned the works which had not found favour with Justinian.

But two developments occurred which complicated matters. Justinian and Vigilius had reckoned without western opinion. Clerics from the West resident in Constantinople made their opposition felt, and a council of the bishops of Dacia declared Benenatus, the archbishop of Justiniana Prima, deposed. More important, however, was the response of the African church. Since its earliest days this had been a church of superabundant energies, and the Africans, who had been effectively insulated from involvement in the affairs of the universal church during the century of Vandal power, quickly began to make up for lost time. Ferrandus, a deacon of Carthage, bombarded contacts in Rome, southern Italy and Constantinople with letters arguing for a strict Chalcedonian position; among his correspondents was the Roman deacon Pelagius, later to become pope. Bishop Facundus of Hermiane wrote an enormous *Defence of the Three Chapters* addressed to Justinian which concluded by inviting him to acknowledge that he was wrong, a move not calculated to win the favour of the emperor. In 550 the African bishops met in

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synod and excommunicated the bishop of Rome, writing to the emperor to explain their hostility to his policy.

Justinian was quick to respond. While Benenatus continued to enjoy his office, the emperor's African opponents were summoned to Constantinople. The bishop of Carthage was exiled and replaced by a more pliable man who had hitherto been his apocrisarius in the royal city, a sequence of events closely paralleling the fall of pope Silverius, but the new appointee found it difficult to gain acceptance. Other bishops who resisted the emperor were sent into exile. Zoilus, the patriarch of Alexandria who had been installed in place of Paul, was removed from his post and replaced by a man thought to be reliable.

But Justinian had not only to confront the unexpected level of resistance to his plan. The situation was further complicated by the death of Theodora in June 548. This occurred not long after the inhabitants of Constantinople had been alarmed by a severe storm of thunder and lightning, and there may have been those who saw a connection. An African author, Victor of Tunnunna, is our only source to give a reason for her death, and he expressed himself starkly: 'The empress Theodora, an enemy of the council of Chalcedon, finished her life in a way which constituted a portent, stricken by disease throughout her body'.[9] The Latin word 'cancer', here translated 'disease', can mean cancer, but has a range of other meanings, and Victor did not necessarily mean that Theodora died of the disease now called cancer. But theologically committed authors of the period delighted in attributing gruesome deaths to those of other persuasions, which they were always ready to see as punishment, and there is no doubt that the death of Theodora was welcome to Victor, who was content to describe Monophysites as 'the faction of the empress Theodora'. She had been unpopular with the adherents of Chalcedon, such as S Sabas, an influential supporter of the council of Chalcedon in Palestine, who had refused her request to pray that she would bear Justinian a child. He contented himself with praying for the welfare of the state.

Monophysite authors, on the other hand, referred to Theodora as 'the believing queen', and clerics of their persuasion

9. Victor of Tunnunna *Chron. s.a.* 549.2 (ed. Th. Mommsen, *Monumenta Germaniae Historica Auctores Antiquissimi* 11).

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who turned up in Constantinople could count on being made welcome by her. Some of them were men of wild eccentricity, such as Mare the solitary, who, on being presented by her with a hundredweight of gold, threw the bag away as if it were full of light apples. Antics of this kind endeared ascetics to their patrons, and Mare was given the use of a villa outside the city, where so many important people visited him that robbers concluded he was receiving gold. At the end of his life, when he was informed by God that he would shortly die from the plague, Mare was able to use his contacts in the palace to have his tomb built in advance. Theodora was estimated to have sheltered 500 Monophysite clerics in a palace where holy men continually gave themselves up to vigils, fasts and prayers. After his fall in 536 the patriarch Anthemius had been hidden by Theodora in her palace, and it was believed that Justinian only became aware of this after his wife died. She also supported Monophysite clergy elsewhere: on the island of Chios, for example, she built a refuge for monks where banished bishops could live, while it was estimated that she maintained some 300 clerics at a fortress in Thrace. Theophanes, writing early in the ninth century, believed that she had been responsible for the reconciliation between Vigilius and Menas in June 548, and a wide variety of Monophysite texts credit her with having exerted a wholesome influence over Justinian.[10] When Justinian determined to see to the conversion of the Nubians to Christianity, she was credited with bringing it about that, contrary to his plan, a team of Monophysite missionaries was first in the field.

It is hard to know how to interpret this. Perhaps Theodora brazenly defied her husband by pursuing policies contradictory to his. On the other hand, it is possible that the wily Justinian was making use of his wife to keep doors open to the Monophysites, and that the couple merely pretended to disagree (cf. Procopius *Secret History* 10.14f). In any case, the vigour of the western response to his policies, together with the death of Theodora, weakened the Monophysite cause in

10. See for example A. Campagnano 'Monaci egiziani fra V e VI secolo' *Vetera Christianorum* 15 1978: 223–46; *History of the Patriarchs of the Coptic Church of Alexandria* 2 ed. and trans. B. Evetts *Patrologia Orientalis* 1/4, 460; John of Ephesus *Lives of the Eastern Saints* ed. and trans. E.W. Brooks *Patrologia Orientalis* 17/1, 18/4, 19/2, *passim.*

a game which Justinian found himself playing for increasingly high stakes. But it was not in his nature to admit defeat. If his attempt to use the pope to bring about concord between warring theological positions had failed, there remained the possibility of placing the matter before an ecumenical council, as earlier emperors had done with important issues.

. . .

AN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL AND ITS AFTERMATH

Justinian prepared the ground by issuing, in July 551, a carefully argued edict containing thirteen anathemas.[11] Vigilius, who had not been consulted, fled from the palace where he had been staying to S Peter's church at the Hormisdas palace, from which, in the following month, he excommunicated Menas again. Justinian sent troops to arrest the pope, but he grabbed the altar and could not be removed from the church. The next day he was visited by a high-powered delegation comprised entirely of Latin speakers. Its members were Belisarius, to whose actions Vigilius may have felt he owed his accession to the papal throne, Cethegus, the prominent senator who had fled to the royal city a few years earlier, Peter the patrician, a diplomat with Italian experience, and Justin, the emperor's nephew. They took an oath that Vigilius would be unharmed if he returned to his old quarters, whereupon he made his way back. But he was still marginal to the life of the city. When the church of S Eirene across the Golden Horn was dedicated in September, it was the patriarch of Alexandria who sat with Menas in the imperial carriage. Vigilius remained unhappy, and on the night before Christmas Eve in 551 he fled across the Bosphorus to the church of S Euphemia. The choice of refuge was significant, for it was the church where the council of Chalcedon had met just a one hundred years earlier. On 28 January 552 Belisarius again waited on the pope with a group sent by Justinian, but it was some months before Vigilius returned to Constantinople.

Other developments worked in Justinian's favour. In August 552 Menas, the patriarch of Constantinople, died; before he was buried his successor had been enthroned. Eutychius, the son of one of Belisarius' officers, was a monk who was in

11. The edict is one of the documents translated by Kenneth P. Wesche *The Person of Christ the Christology of Emperor Justinian* Crestwood NY 1991.

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Constantinople representing the sick bishop of Amesia, and the emperor was sure he would not let him down. Further, the success of Narses in Italy meant that there was less need for Justinian to be wary of offending Italian opinion.

So it was that Justinian summoned a great council, which is regarded to this day as the fifth of the ecumenical councils of the church, the second among them to have been held in Constantinople. It held its first meeting on 5 May 553. The biographer of Eutychius represented the council as a new Pentecost, bishops having come to Constantinople, which he described as the new Jerusalem, from every nation, but of the 145 bishops who attended very few were from the West.[12] Vigilius declined invitations to join them, preferring to sulk nearby. Justinian refrained from attending the meetings of the council, despite the precedents set by earlier emperors, but a letter which was read at its first session made his wishes clear, and its meetings took place in the complex of Hagia Sophia, disquietingly close to the palace. On 14 May Vigilius produced a document which made some concessions to Justinian's demands, but it was not enough, and late in the month Justinian played his trump card. The quaestor Constantine told the council that Justinian had evidence that the pope had agreed to condemn the Three Chapters, including one document in his own handwriting and another which bore his signature. Vigilius now payed the penalty for his earlier temporizing. Justinian proposed to the council that the name of the pope be struck from the diptychs, the lists of the names of hierarchs in the communion of the church proclaimed during the eucharist, and this was agreed to. There was little left for the bishops to do. At its last session on 2 June the council affirmed the council of Chalcedon, but it also accepted the validity of the formula of Cyril of Alexandria, 'one nature incarnate of God the Word', an ambiguous phrase which could certainly be understood in a Monophysite sense. The Three Chapters and teachings of Origen and his followers were condemned in accordance with Justinian's wishes.

The pope had been humiliated. Still in Constantinople, in December he wrote to Eutychius saying that he had changed

12. E. Chrysos *Die Bischofslisten des V. Ökumenischen Konzils (553)* Bonn 1966. On the council as a new Pentecost, *Vita Eutychii* 4.27 (*Patrologia Graeca* 86:2305), with reference to Acts 2:5.

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his mind: after all, if S Augustine had written a book of Retractions, he was in good company in renouncing an erroneous opinion! He explained that he had come to see that the Three Chapters should be condemned. It may be that news of the successes of Narses in Italy had encouraged Vigilius to trim his sails. But Justinian wanted more than this, and in February 554 the pope issued another document explicitly accepting the decrees of the council. It was a disingenuous piece, claiming, for example, that the letter of Ibas read at the council of Chalcedon was not authentic, but it was enough to gain him freedom. In the following year Vigilius left for Rome, but had only reached Sicily when he died. His body was taken to Rome, where it was buried not in S Peter's but outside the walls of the city.

His successor, Pelagius, was a man of varied experience. He had negotiated with Totila in Rome but was well known in Constantinople, having previously acted as Justinian's agent in dealing with a scandal in the church of Alexandria, and he played a complex role in the dealings of popes with Justinian and Theodora. He had initially been a supporter of the Three Chapters and taken a firmer stand than Vigilius, but the possibility of further preferment proved stronger than his principles, and Pelagius soon became an enthusiastic supporter of Justinian's line. His docility was rewarded.

Pelagius, however, was by no means the only cleric of the time to owe promotion to Justinian. The middle of the sixth century saw imperial involvement in appointments to important sees on a scale for which church history offered no precedent. On one occasion pope Vigilius had celebrated the liturgy in Hagia Sophia with the patriarchs of Constantinople, Alexandria and Antioch. The mood around the altar must have been one of tension, but it may have occurred to the minds of some of the participants how much their careers owed to the patronage of Justinian. Vigilius had been appointed pope while Silverius was alive, just as Apollinaris had become patriarch of Alexandria while Zoilus lived, an irregularity which even evoked a protest from the usually complaisant Vigilius, who doubtless forgot how he had come to be pope. In such company the accession of Eutychius of Constantinople, whom Justinian had appointed to his see while the body of his predecessor lay in the cathedral, had been dignified. The occupants of other important sees similarly owed

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their preferment to Justinian: Primosus of Carthage had been appointed after the sacking of Reparatus, Vitalis of Milan had been appointed to his see after the death of the previous occupant in 552, and Maximianus of Ravenna had been appointed while in the royal city.

Justinian's policy of interference did not, however, prove to be an effective one. When Pelagius arrived in Rome as the nominee of the emperor only two bishops could be found who were prepared to consecrate him, and it was believed among the people that he had been a party to the death of Vigilius. In 556 he issued a profession of faith addressed to the whole Christian people, which marked a wholesale retreat from the position Justinian had taken: by its acceptance of four ecumenical councils it tacitly denied the ecumenical status of the council of Constantinople, by affirming the orthodoxy of Ibas and Theodoret it contradicted their condemnation by the council, and by accepting the letters of popes as far as Agapetus it passed over Vigilius in silence. Pelagius was prepared to abandon the line taken by his imperial patron, but this was not enough to win him the support of the West. In northern Italy the bishops of Milan and Aquileia withdrew from communion with the see of Rome, and refused to be placated. Pelagius, who had picked up some of Justinian's ways, hoped the recalcitrant pair could be arrested and shipped to Constantinople, but Narses refused to co-operate. The schism over the Three Chapters which began in the pontificate of Pelagius was to last until the end of the seventh century.

One of the Italians who was in Constantinople for the greater part if not the whole of pope Vigilius' stay there was Cassiodorus. As we have seen, in the 530s he had hoped to found a centre for Christian studies in Rome after the pattern of an institution in Nisibis, a city of the Syrians. It is true that Cassiodorus states that instruction there was given to Jews (Hebreis), but this may be a conventional expression for 'Nestorians'.[13] One of the most boring theological texts ever

13. G. Fiaccadori 'Cassiodorus and the school of Nisibis' *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 39 1985: 135–7 argues for a school of Nestorians. It has occurred to me to wonder whether Cassiodorus only came to know of the school at Nisibis while he was in Constantinople, for the words 'sicut . . . exponi' of *Institutiones* 1 praef. 1 (cited above, ch. 4 n. 17, 3.8–10: ed. R.A.B. Mynors, Oxford 1937) do not necessarily reflect knowledge he had during the 530s. If he only came to know of the school while in the royal city, perhaps he owed his information to Junillus.

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written is the short *Institutes* composed by an African, Junillus, whom Justinian appointed to the office of quaestor in succession to Tribonian in 541/542. At the beginning of the work, which he addressed to the African bishop Primasius at a time when the latter was in Constantinople, Junillus explains that he had benefitted from the teaching of a certain Paul, a Persian who had been educated in the school of the Syrians at Nisibis, a place where the divine law was transmitted by teachers who taught in public, just as the worldly subjects of grammar and rhetoric were transmitted in areas with which he was himself familiar. But Paul was himself a tributary to another scriptural scholar, Theodore of Mopsuestia, one of Justinian's *bêtes noires.*

Presumably Cassiodorus was familiar with the circles in which Justinian's theological antagonist Junillus moved. An exposition of the Psalms on which he was working during the time Vigilius was in Constantinople contains frequent references to the two natures of Christ. Cassiodorus once breaks into a citation of the council of Chalcedon, and on another occasion refers to the two natures in Chalcedonian language as having been 'unmixed, unchanged, undivided and not separated'. The sentiments are unexceptionable, but suggest a degree of dogmatic concern not always found in works of scriptural commentary. Cassiodorus also refers to two books on the two natures of Christ 'which the venerable bishop Facundus, who destroys heretics with penetrating acuteness, recently wrote to the *princeps* Justinian', and goes on to cite a definition of a heretic provided by 'one of the fathers', who seems to have been Justinian's enemy Primasius.[14] In his *Institutiones* Cassiodorus recommended the work of Primasius on the Apocalypse and his work *Quid faciat hereticum*; elsewhere he recommended among introductory works on the Bible that by Junillus. A final pointer to Cassiodorus' attitude to Justinian's activities is his having an Ecclesiastical History prepared on the basis of translations from three Greek authors, one of whom was Theodoret of Cyrrhus. Cassiodorus, then, may be seen as having taken a decidedly cool attitude to Justinian's theological activities. He consistently wrote in favour of the council of Chalcedon, which some felt had been

14. *Expositio in psalmam* 138.548–52, 560–4 (=*Corpus Christianorum Series Latina* 98:1255).

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endangered by the council of 553, and Justinian's theological opponents.

Nor did Justinian carry the day in Africa. It is from an African source that we learn that immediately after the council of 553 an earthquake rocked Constantinople. In the early 560s the archdeacon Liberatus of Carthage wrote his *Breviarium* to provide the background to the entire controversy, starting with the forerunners to Nestorios. In his preface he lists among his sources an Ecclesiastical History recently translated out of Greek into Latin, which must be the Historia Tripartita for which Cassiodorus had been responsible, and the work is unsympathetic to Justinian. Another hostile African, the chronicler Victor of Tunnunna, finished writing his Chronicle in 565/566, and it contains no sign of any softening towards the emperor.

In Spain as well the line taken by Justinian was not popular. Writing in the early seventh century, Isidore of Seville could assert that there had been four 'venerable synods' held by the church, implicitly denying the claims of the council of 553 to ecumenicity, that the list of Roman legislators concludes with Theodosius, implicitly denying the importance of Justinian's work in this field, and that the sending of the Byzantine expedition to Spain in 552 was at the behest of an illegitimate power. In his work on famous men, Isidore is complimentary about some of the African opponents of Justinian, and an anonymous Spanish author of the seventh century made the drift of the original explicit by inserting additional material critical of the emperor.[15]

So it is that in the three areas of the West which were the subjects of invasion by Justinian there is good reason for believing that the emperor came to be regarded in a bad light. Indeed, the only major see in these territories which supported Justinian's theological line was Ravenna. As we have seen its bishop, Maximianus, was an imperial appointee, and other kinds of evidence suggest that his see was the recipient of a good deal of imperial largesse: the grant of a forest in Istria, the bestowing of the title 'archbishop' on its incumbent, and the expansion of his power over other churches all point

15. This work must be consulted in the edition of C.C. Merino, *El 'De viris illustris' de Isidoro de Sevilla Estudio y edicion critica* Salamanca 1964 (=*Theses et studia philologica salmanticensia* XII).

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in this direction.[16] Even in Gaul there was rumbling discontent which tactful measures on the part of pope Pelagius were not able to overcome. Bishop Nicetius of Trier wrote a blunt letter to Justinian informing him that all Italy, the whole of Africa, Spain and Gaul together grieved over him and anathematized him, and asked the rhetorical question 'Oh sweet Justinian of ours, who had deceived you?'[17] It is hard to imagine the emperor losing any sleep over this letter from a backwoods bishop outside the empire. But Nicetius' estimate of the extent of western opposition to Justinian's religious policies, which is only a little exaggerated, encourages one to speculate why the opposition developed on the scale it did. It is hard to credit the condemnation of three scholars almost unknown in the West with having excited passions of this depth, and one wonders whether we have here another symptom of a deep unease in the West at the outcome of the wars Justinian had launched there.

If this was not enough, the council of 553 had totally failed in its purpose of reconciling the opponents of the council of Chalcedon with its supporters. Its decrees seem to have left Monophysite opinion unmoved, and the progress towards reconciliation which was under way early in the 530s was stone dead. Only in the ecumenical climate of the late twentieth century have Orthodox and Monophysite theologians agreed to put behind them the problems caused by the definition of the council of Chalcedon. Further, Justinian's years of effort not only failed to bring about reconciliation between Chalcedonians and Monophysites, but occasioned a division among the former which was not quickly overcome. His efforts not only failed, but backfired. Just as the East and West came to feel further apart thanks to Justinian's wars, so did his ecclesiastical policies contribute to a distancing between the Christian groups he sought to bring together.

16. See the important study by T.S. Brown, 'The Church of Ravenna and the imperial administration in the seventh century' *English Historical Review* 94 1979: 1–28. The rise of the bishops of Ravenna and Justiniana Prima, and generous treatment which the bishop of Carthage received from Justinian, suggest a policy of granting churches a status linked with the importance of their respective towns within the political framework of the empire. Such a principle would have been disastrous for the see of Rome.
17. *Monumenta Germaniae Historica Epistolae* 3:118f. (*Epistolae Austrasicae*, ed. W. Gundlach).

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MISSIONARY ENTERPRISE

But it would be a mistake to conclude that Justinian's involvement in church affairs was a total failure. In one area, Justinian's policy concerning the church worked very well, for it was in his reign and that of his uncle Justin that a great flowering of Byzantine missionary activity occurred.[18]

We have already seen how Justinian had sponsored the preaching activities of John of Ephesos in Asia Minor. But he was more interested in the conversion of people outside the empire. One group to be converted were the Abasgi, who lived on the eastern coast of the Black Sea. Justinian built them a church dedicated to the Theotokos and sent clergy, and put pressure on them to cease making eunuchs of attractive boys.[19] Early in his reign he was sponsor to Grepes, the king of the Heruls, at his baptism. In about 542 missionaries were sent to Nubia, the land to the south of Egypt. Christian influences had been at work there for some time, and in about 535 a general, acting on orders from Justinian, destroyed the pagan shrines. Before long, plans to convert the Nubians were under way, but as we have seen, Justinian and Theodora were thought to have sent rival teams of evangelists, respectively orthodox and Monophysite. Contemporaries believed the success of the latter was due to the skulduggery of the empress, who threatened the duke of the Thebaid with the loss of his head if her missionaries were not the first to arrive. It is hard to know how seriously to take this story, but the conversion of the Nubians proceeded.

It would be naive, however, to think of the expansion of Christianity under imperial auspices as nothing more than a stage in the history of the triumphal march of Christianity across medieval history. The diffusion of Christianity is one of the most significant things to have occurred in the middle ages, and the missionary can stand with the knight and the merchant as an agent in the spread of western European and

18. See in general I. Engelhardt *Mission und Politik in Byzanz Ein Beitrag zur Strukturanalyse byzantinischer Mission zur Zeit Justins und Justinians* Munich 1974, comprehensive if rather schematic.
19. The Abasgi had sold the eunuchs to the Romans. In 558 Justinian issued a novel (no. 142) seeking to suppress the making of eunuchs within the empire, a practice which may have become more common following the conversion of the Abasgi.

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Byzantine influence in this period. But the different relationships between ecclesiastical and secular power which obtained in the medieval west and east led to their diffusing Christianity by different means. In the west the missionaries who found their way to such lands as England and Germany usually did so under papal, or at any rate ecclesiastical, auspices. But in the east the process of conversion tended to occur under the aegis of the state, and so could easily be harnessed for the political purposes of the empire.

A good example of this is the conversion of a Hunnish ruler, Grod (John Malalas 431f). In 528 he came to Constantinople, was baptized, with Justinian himself being his sponsor, and returned home laden with gifts. His base was the Crimean city of Bosporus, where he was expected to act in support of Roman interests. But he proved too enthusiastic a Christian. He ordered that the idols of silver and electrum were to be melted down, whereupon the pagans killed him and the garrison which guarded the city. Justinian mounted an expedition against the murderers of his ally, part of which proceeded by sea and part by land, making the difficult march around the Black Sea coast. The Huns fled, and Bosporus remained under Roman power.

The coming of Christianity to another people, the Tzani, is also interesting from this point of view. Procopius explains that, as a result of the activities of the general Sittas, Theodora's brother-in-law, they changed their way of living so as to be more gentle, signed up for service with the Roman forces, and abandoned their own way of thinking for the more pious one of the Christians (*Wars* 1.15.25). Elsewhere he provides details of the package of which Christianity was a part: roads were improved to make the Tzani more open to external influences, and fortresses manned by Romans were built in their territory (*Buildings* 3.6.9–13). So it was that they came to prefer toilless servitude to dangerous liberty.[20] Justinian was using methods remarkably similar to those by which western influence is transmitted to third world countries today. Before long the Armenians were complaining to Khusrau that Justinian had made slaves of the hitherto independent Tzani, having set a Roman ruler over their king (*Wars* 2.3.39), and indeed the preface to Justinian's first novel, issued in 535, refers to the Tzani as for the first time being able to be considered among the subjects of the Romans.

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It is therefore possible to see the expansion of Christianity as part of a process we would now term imperialism.[21] Justinian is an early example of a tradition which was to remain potent for much of the history of the Byzantine empire and beyond, and the empire was later to derive great benefit from the application of this aspect of his religious policy. But another point deserves emphasis. One cannot help but notice that the bulk of these activities occurred within a few years of Justinian's coming to power. Indeed, they occurred at about the time he concluded his alliance with Harith, the Ghassanid Arab, and, as we shall see, at about the time when he sent an ambassador to distant Axum. This, of course, constitutes further evidence, of an indirect kind, for interpreting his overtly evangelistic activities in a somewhat sinister light, as having been in part politically motivated. It also gives us yet more reason for judging the opening years of his reign to have been a time of powerful initiatives in the most diverse fields. Time would tell whether Justinian would prove capable of keeping so many balls in the air at once.

20. (*opposite*) *Buildings* 3.6.6 (ed. and trans. H.B. Dewing, London 1914–1940), with which compare Milton:

nations grown corrupt
And by their vices brought to servitude
Then to love Bondage more then Liberty
(*Samson Agonistes* 268–70), and

Preferring
Hard liberty before the easie yoke
Of servile pomp (*Paradise Lost* 2.255–7).

21. Compare the words John of Nikiu attributes to a group of Lazi who came before Justinian: 'We wish thee to make us Christians like thyself, and we shall then be subjects of the Roman empire' (*Chronicle*, trans. R.H. Charles, London 1916, 90.37).

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Chapter 6

THE NORTH

The boom which has occurred in the study of Byzantine history over the last few decades has made historians far more prepared to give due weight to the role of the empire in late antiquity and the early middle ages. Yet this new emphasis has meant an eastward shift in a perspective of which the centre of gravity still remains firmly centred on the Mediterranean. Of course there are good grounds for adopting such a perspective, which was that of contemporaries. It is well caught in a large mosaic map which was installed on a pavement at Mabada in Jordan, probably in the second half of the sixth century. The part of the map which survives includes a fascinating depiction of some of the buildings of Jerusalem, Justinian's Nea Church among them, although in its original form the work must have covered a block of territory extending approximately from Thebes in Egypt to Damascus, if not beyond. But the difference in direction between the coastlines of Palestine and Egypt is largely smoothed out, which suggests that the point of observation for each coast is the Mediterranean.[1] Similarly, when a writer in Gaul drew up a list of twenty noble cities of the Roman world late in the fourth century, half of them lay on the Mediterranean coast, while the remainder were all close to a sea or on major rivers.[2] In the ancient world political, commercial and ecclesiastical power was concentrated on coastal cities, which prospered

1. O.A.W. Dilke *Greek and Roman Maps* Ithaca NY 1985 pp. 151f (not accurate in all respects).
2. Ausonius *Ordo urbium nobilium* (ed. and trans. H.G.E. White, London 1919).

thanks to the wealth and human talent transferred to them from their hinterlands. Roman and Byzantine political history is full of men, such as Zeno, Justin and Justinian, who came from a province to find their fortune in the capital, and for every one who succeeded there must have been hundreds who failed. So it was that when the inhabitants of the empire thought about its geographical extent it was natural for them to envisage it as a great expanse of land lying around the Mediterranean.[3] And Justinian's wars in the West, rarely fought far from the coast, strengthened the Mediterranean axis of the empire.

Yet inland areas persisted in forcing themselves onto the attention of the state. Although Justinian's legislation immediately after the stunningly quick victory over the Vandals bespeaks a confidence that all of Africa had been successfully reintegrated into the empire, as it turned out the Vandal war was merely the prelude to a much longer period of fighting against the Moors who were based in the interior, just as the Gothic war was followed by trouble from the Franks and, far more seriously, the Lombards. What was true of the conquered western areas was also true of the empire's north. Just a few hundred kilometres to the northwest of Constantinople lay the Danube frontier, a river which the army found it difficult to police effectively. Any invading force which crossed it could seek to plunder the Balkans, the hilly landscape of which made it ideal for raiding expeditions, while for the more ambitious, the coastal cities of Thessaloniki and Constantinople itself were glittering temptations. While Constantinople was excellently located with respect to the sea, commanding as it did the passage between the Black Sea and the Sea of Marmara, beyond which lay the Mediterranean, it was a different story when it came to the land; any force which crossed the Danube and headed towards the east would inevitably end up before its walls.

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PROBLEMS IN THE BALKANS

In the disturbed conditions of late antiquity the Balkans had

3. Procopius *Wars* 3.1 (ed. and trans. H.B. Dewing, London 1914–1940), a fascinating attempt to conceptualize Roman territory.

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become a major concern for the government.[4] What textbooks call the fall of the Roman empire is generally described in a narrative which begins in 376, when large numbers of Goths entered the empire not in the West, where they were to end up, but across the Danube. Just two years later they won a victory at Adrianople (Erdine), killing the emperor Valens in the process. In the winter of 394–395 further instability was caused by a crossing of the Danube by Huns, a pastoral people from central Asia who were being led by changes in the ecological situation to abandon their homeland. Romans and barbarians all looked on this people with dread, and their arrival was enough to cause the Gothic leader Alaric to lead his people towards Constantinople, from which he was deflected by the promise of land in Macedonia. Here the Goths were to be based until they moved into Italy in 401, by which time another group of Goths had briefly occupied Constantinople in 400. In 408 another group of Huns crossed the Danube, and before long the Romans were paying them an annual subsidy to desist from further attacks. But a later ruler of the Huns, the famous Attila, was able to increase the payments. In 441 Niš (the classical Naissus) had been destroyed; a diplomat who passed by in 449 reported that the city was uninhabited, and a hundred years later its wall was still in ruins.

Before long Attila tired of his remarkably successful extortion racket. He turned his attention to the West, only to die in 453. His sons were unable to maintain his power, and in 469 the head of one of them was taken to Constantinople to be publicly displayed. But the demise of the Huns opened the way to the rise of Germanic peoples whom they had kept under their thumb. For decades Goths ravaged areas of the Balkans and dabbled in the politics of the empire; some of them attacked Constantinople itself in 471, 481 and 487, and it may have been simply to rid himself of the threat they posed that in 488 Zeno commissioned Theoderic the Ostrogoth to invade Italy. But troubles continued. Relations between Theoderic's kingdom, which extended across the Adriatic to

4. For the Goths, P.J. Heather *Goths and Romans 332–489* Oxford 1991 is a sound guide; for the Huns, O.J. Maenchen-Helfen *The World of the Huns* (ed. M. Knight) Berkeley 1974 is a work of amazing erudition, if somewhat eccentric.

include Dalmatia, and the empire were uneasy, and on more than one occasion tensions escalated into open warfare. Another general, Vitalian, who seems to have been of Gothic ancestry, attacked Constantinople from the European side three times towards the end of the reign of Anastasius, even though he fought for the empire.

But despite the traumas they caused, the presence of the Huns and Goths in the Balkans was transient, and their impact minor. Urban life continued, even if it was sometimes poured into new channels. The inhabitants of Nicopolis-ad-Istrum in the northern foothills of the Stara Planina, for example, migrated 18 kilometres to the better protected site of Veliko Turnovo, where an active building programme was sustained in the fifth and sixth centuries. It was not the Huns and the Goths but the various groups of people who followed on their heels who were destined to have an important impact. Ominously, in 493 a force which seems to have been comprised of Bulgars crossed the Danube. The ethnic origin of this people is not clear, but like the Huns they seem to have been a steppe folk from central Asia; only centuries later were they to be Slavicized. Their raids met with some success, and it was probably to protect Constantinople against them that Anastasius built, or at any rate strengthened, what contemporaries called the Long Wall.

These were not the first walls to protect the city. Constantine and his son Constantius had equipped it with a set of walls, and early in the fifth century Theodosius II responded to the rapid expansion of the city by erecting new walls, six kilometres long, which almost doubled the enclosed area. Eleven metres high and amazingly solid, they were not successfully breached until 1204, and are the best-preserved Roman walls to be seen anywhere today. The Long Wall, however, answered to a different defensive need. Some 65 kilometres west of the city, it ran from the Black Sea to the Sea of Marmara, and so protected not only the city but its environs as well. It may have run for 45 kilometres, and we know from surviving portions that it was 3.3 metres thick and up to five metres high. But it could offer no protection to areas more distant from Constantinople. In 499 Bulgars defeated a Roman army sent against them in Thrace, 4000 imperial soldiers dying in the encounter, and three years later another force of Bulgars met with no resistance in Thrace. In 517 enemies penetrated as

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far south as the pass of Thermopylai in Greece, although these may not have been Bulgars but members of another group of raiders which troubled the empire.

Worse troubles lay ahead. Before long other peoples, called Sklavinoi and Antai, came on the scene. In the sixth century it was held that they had the same origin, and they could be described as being somewhat reddish in appearance, in contrast to the fair-haired Goths. Debates have raged about the ethnic identity of these peoples, but it is widely believed now that they can be seen as southern and eastern Slavs respectively. The origin of the Slavs is itself a controversial topic, but in very general terms it seems clear that while the Germanic peoples were moving towards the west in late antiquity, Slavs were following in their footsteps, the Sklavinoi coming to settle in large numbers on the northern bank of the Danube and the Antai basing themselves in the modern Ukraine. The Sklavinoi in particular posed a long-term threat, for they were not so much warriors as farmers, steadily working their way across the map; as the experience of parts of the sub-Roman West was to prove, these were the barbarians who made the greatest impact.

The outlook in the early sixth century was therefore confused, but it was not entirely depressing. During the reign of Justinian's uncle Justin a large army of Antai which crossed the Danube was defeated by the emperor's nephew Germanus, and that a Roman army could march from Constantinople to the Crimea, as happened following the murder of Justinian's ally Grod, suggests that the position of the empire in the eastern Balkans was healthy. Meanwhile, the baptism of Grepes, the king of the Heruls, in Constantinople in 528 and the grant to his people of land in the area of Singidunum (Belgrade), presumably in imperial territory, would have strengthened its position in the west, while the difficulties the Ostrogoths found themselves in following the death of Theoderic in 526 were a source of satisfaction. There were also some useful military successes early in Justinian's reign which, in time-honoured fashion, were often the work of barbarian generals whom the empire used to deal with other barbarians. Justinian responded to a savage raid by the Bulgars by appointing a Gepid, Mundus, commander-in-chief in Illyricum, while in 530 or 531 Chilbudius, a Slav, was appointed to keep Huns, Antai and Sklavinoi from crossing the Danube. He discharged

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his office well, taking warfare into the territories of his opponents. The empire was adept at putting northerners to good use: when Vitalian attacked Constantinople in 513 his force included Huns and Bulgars, and in the 530s an Utigur fought in Belisarius' host in Africa, while some Sklavinoi from the region of the Danube were part of the first Roman army sent against the Ostrogoths. Progress was also made further to the west, where Sirmium, which had been a part of the Ostrogothic kingdom of Italy, was occupied at the beginning of the Gothic war. As in so many other areas, there seemed grounds for optimism during the early part of Justinian's reign. Indeed, a document of 533 accords the emperor the title 'Anticus', implying military success over the Antai.

More importantly, work began on a new city named after the emperor, Justiniana Prima. The large number of towns named after emperors in antiquity is a sign of imperial vanity, or sometimes the wish to gain imperial favour. The practice could be taken to extraordinary lengths, and the bestowing of an imperial name on a town was no guarantee that it would not be renamed: thus, Adrianopolis, named after Hadrian, was later renamed Justinianopolis. In Africa, the Vandal king Huneric had renamed Hadrumentum, the capital of Byzacena, Unuricopolis, but after the conquest of Africa it was renamed Justiniana; the town now bears the name Sousse. Carthage temporarily acquired the name Justiniana, as did various other towns. The inhabitants of another African town renamed it Theodorias, while the public bath at Carthage was named Theodorianae. After the suburb of Sykai, just across the Golden Horn from Constantinople, had been rebuilt, it was given the name Justinianopolis. Indeed, the second part of the name Justiniana Prima was necessary to distinguish it from a fortress nearby which received the name Justiniana Secunda.

The new town is probably to be identified with Caričin Grad, 45 kilometres south of Niš. Our one written account of the city (Procopius *Buildings* 4.1.19–27) is bursting with clichés, but we know from the work of archaeologists that its walls enclosed a small site noteworthy for its number of churches; as with many urban environments of late antiquity, Justiniana Prima possessed far more churches than pastoral or liturgical needs would seem to have required. In 535 Justinian issued a law which specified the privileges of the

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archbishop of Justiniana Prima (novel 11). The law stated that its bishop was to be not only a metropolitan but also an archbishop, and was to hold ecclesiastical power over a wide swathe of territory. This high-handed action, which was typical of Justinian's interventions in church affairs, elicited a cool response from pope Agapetus, but Justinian felt it was in keeping with the movement of the headquarters of the praetorian prefect of Illyricum. Traditionally this official had been based at Sirmium, but in the days of Attila he had retreated to Thessaloniki. We learn from a law of 535, however, of his relocation to Justiniana Prima, halfway between Sirmium and Thessaloniki.[5] The foundation of a new town where civil and ecclesiastical power was concentrated was a vote of confidence in the north. Indeed, in his law of 535 Justinian boasted that, with the help of God, the extent of the state had grown to encompass both banks of the Danube, and even named some towns north of the Danube subject to his power.

These were good days. But the situation gradually worsened. The splendid roads the Romans had built in the Balkans turned into a liability, for they allowed invaders from the north easy access. In 534 Chilbudius was killed in battle. Shortly after this the Gepids, a Germanic people, were able to seize Sirmium, and when Justinian sought to turn the Lombards, another barbarian people, against the Gepids, he had the indignity of seeing his new allies turn against another of his allies. In 540 the appearance of a comet was followed by an incursion by a large force made up of Bulgars, or a similar people. They captured thirty-two fortresses in Illyricum, breached the defences of the Gallipoli peninsula where they proceeded to create havoc, and, having forced their way through Anastasius' Long Wall, they proceeded to sack the suburbs of Constantinople and cause terror in the court. They also succeeded for the first time in capturing a walled town, generally a difficult operation for barbarian forces. The raiders were said to have retired with 120 000 captives; a later author wrote of an infinite number of wild beasts creating

5. In practice, however, the prefect may have continued to reside in Thessaloniki: P. Lemerle 'Invasions et migrations dans les Balkans depuis la fin de l'époque romaine jusqu'au VIIIe siècle' *Revue historique* 430 1954: 265–308 at 267–71. This study remains an invaluable guide to the literary evidence.

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trouble in Thrace at that time, and the burial of two coin hoards which have been found in Bulgaria, one of them buried near Pazardzhik and the other near Pernik, has been plausibly associated with this invasion. At the pass of Thermopylai in Greece another group worked its way around the wall and went on to ravage the land to the south, as far as the Peloponnesos.

Worse was to follow. In the middle of the 540s a large force of Sklavinoi crossed the Danube and made its way into Illyricum, laying waste the country and enslaving the wives and children of soldiers from those parts who were fighting the Goths in Italy. They were defeated and the captives they had taken liberated, but four coin hoards which have been discovered in Serbia seem to bear witness to the fear they aroused. A few years later an army of Sklavinoi penetrated as far as Dyrrhachium (Durrësi). This town stood at the western end of the Via Egnatia, the main east/west road in the Balkans, and was important in communications with Italy, then an important theatre of war. Although the raiders made no attempt to take the town, merely devoting themselves to the more straightforward tasks of plundering and enslaving the local people, that they had penetrated so far was worrying, and an imperial army of 15 000 men which was in the region did not intervene. Early in 550 the Sklavinoi returned, crossing the Danube and advancing to the Maritza, effortlessly disposing of the Roman forces and capturing fortresses. The prisoners they took were said to have been beyond counting. One contingent made its way to the Adriatic coast where it captured a town which was, as contemporaries gloomily noted, just twelve days' journey from the capital. Later in 550 the Sklavinoi breached the border again, and the Romans learned from captives that they were hoping to capture Thessaloniki. It is highly unlikely that their siegecraft would have allowed them to do this, but Justinian ordered Germanus, who was then preparing his invasion of Italy, to deal with the problem. He died before he could take effective action, whereupon the Sklavinoi took the ominous decision to winter in imperial territory. The next year they split into three groups, one of which defeated a Roman force Justinian sent against them at Adrianople and pillaged as far as the Long Wall.

If this were not enough, trouble loomed from further to

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the west. The Frankish king Theudebert, who had succeeded his father in 533, was a man whose public and private lives were both lived on the wild side. In 539 he had led an army into northern Italy, apparently on a plundering expedition. He was annoyed that Justinian had adopted such titles as Francicus, which implied his subjection to the emperor. At a later stage he occupied large tracts of northern Italy, not only Liguria but also the Cottian Alps and most of Venetia, with the approval of the Gothic king Totila. Theudebert celebrated his success, won in territory Justinian regarded as belonging to the empire, by issuing gold coins bearing his own portrait and the boastful slogan 'Peace and Freedom'. In Constantinople, people complained that not even the Persian king was capable of such arrogant behaviour. On one occasion Theudebert wrote to Justinian explaining that he ruled over a broad stretch of territory which extended from the frontier of Pannonia to the shores of the Ocean. But even this did not satisfy his ambition, for Theudebert set his sights on marching into Thrace and taking Constantinople. He went so far as to canvass the support of the Gepids, Lombards and other peoples, but Justinian invited the Lombards to settle in lands which would block his way, and in 547, before he could carry out his plan, Theudebert was killed in a hunting accident. But it proved difficult to dislodge the Franks from Italy. In 552 they informed one of Justinian's generals that Verona, still held by the Goths, by right belonged to them, and only in 556 did the lands which Theudebert had occupied come under imperial control.

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JUSTINIAN'S RESPONSES

The preceding narrative may have given the impression that Justinian sat nervously in the palace year by year waiting for further bulletins of bad news from the Balkans. To nervousness may have been added a degree of guilt, for the presence in the Balkans of the troops he had committed to Africa and Italy would have been welcome. But the implication of futile resistance which the mere narration of events can easily give is false, for Justinian, as energetic as ever, offered three major responses to the problems which developed in this area. The first of these involved a tightening up of the administration.

Prior to 535 the administration of the Long Wall had been

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entrusted to two officials named vicars, one with civilian and the other with military authority. But, as was so often the case, Justinian found this an untidy arrangement, and in 535 a law was issued which authorized the appointment of a new official, the praetor of Thrace, who, in accordance with the principle which underlay a series of reforms in other parts of the empire, would combine both areas of competence. Here, as elsewhere, it was hoped that greater efficiency would ensue. More important was the establishment of another new office, the quaestor of the army. This official, who is known from a law issued in May 536, was given responsibility for Moesia Secunda and Scythia, which were the two provinces adjacent to the lowest reaches of the Danube, and Caria, Cyprus and the islands of the Ionian Sea, all of which were to be detached from the praetorian prefecture of the East. It was an odd agglomeration of territory, and people living in its southern parts complained that it was a difficult business obtaining justice from the distant quaestor. This official was based at Odessos (Varna), a town on the Black Sea coast not far from areas being attacked; in 538 the bishop of the city was given permission to sell some of the many vineyards which had been left to the church and use the proceeds to buy captives their freedom. The rationale for such an awkwardly shaped administrative unit, which owed such cohesiveness as it possessed to its component parts all lying along coasts or the Danube, was probably the desire to make the defence of the lower Danube area more efficient and assure the reliability of supplies to the troops. There may also have been an expectation that the resources of Cyprus, a traditional centre for ship-building, would be used to strengthen the Danube fleet.

But Justinian's activities went far beyond this. The book in Procopius' *Buildings* which describes the fortifications erected south of the Danube is the longest in the work, occupying a quarter of the whole. At its onset, Procopius states that his subject in this book will be 'Europe'. Elsewhere in his writings he understands this term in its traditional sense, but here his focus is more narrow, Italy, in particular, being excluded from the book. But it is hard to know how to evaluate the mass of material it contains, and even the date at which the work was written is unclear, although about 554 seems likely. In particular the list of over 600 fortresses which Justinian is said to have built or, in the majority of cases, restored, in the Balkans is

hard to assess. The data tend to be uncorroborated by other written or archaeological evidence, and as the purpose of the work is panegyric, one naturally suspects a heightening of the evidence.[6] In particular, it is clear that Anastasius had already begun to upgrade defences in this region, and Procopius, who is known to have attributed to Justinian works carried out in the reign of his uncle Justin, may be suspected of sometimes crediting Justinian with achievements which were not his. Further, Procopius, in accordance with the convention of the time, gives Justinian sole credit for works which he merely repaired or refurbished. There is also the more general question of Justinian's personal involvement, for it is certainly possible that works carried out on local initiative were credited to the emperor. Finally, works undertaken throughout Justinian's long reign are lumped together, making it almost impossible to see when various works were undertaken. The body of material we have is therefore hard to use.

Nevertheless, some patterns emerge which allow us to form some estimate of Justinian's enterprises at the time Procopius was writing. Defences were strengthened along the Danube itself. The town of Singidunum was fortified, and from there down to the mouth of the river an impressive line of fortifications was installed. Another zone of fortresses extended a fluctuating distance to the south of the river. Various considerations governed the location of these fortresses away from the frontier. Some were built along major roads, but many were placed in positions of no strategic importance, which suggests that they are to be seen as refuges for civilians. It is clear that the defences of Greece were a matter for special attention. Extra fortifications were erected at the key site of Thermopylai, where 2000 troops were installed. To the north, a pass between two mountains at Heraclea was closed by a wall. Near Corinth, an old wall across the isthmus was rebuilt, so the Peloponnesos would be secure, while a wall was built across the entrance to Pallene, the westernmost of the three

6. But not necessarily, for archaeological work at Bostra, the capital of the province of Arabia, suggests undertakings on a scale far greater than what a reader of Procopius (*Buildings* 5.9.22 ed. and trans. H.B., Dewing, London 1914–1940) would expect: J.-M. Dentzer 'Bosra' in *Contribution française à l'archéologie syrienne* Damascus 1989: 133–41. It is reasonable to expect that archaeological findings will cast more light on the reliability of Procopius in this regard.

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promontories of Chalcidice. The strengthening of sites so far from the Danube may seem clear evidence of weakness, although on the other hand it could be argued that it suggests that raiding parties were heading so far south because they were finding it increasingly difficult to gain booty near the frontier, and hence that the defensive measures were working. A section at the eastern end of the Via Egnatia, the highway which ran westwards from Constantinople to Dyrrhachium, was repaved with large stones, while another project near the royal city saw the Long Wall strengthened. At the isthmus of Gallipoli an old wall was torn down and replaced by a high one, itself protected by a deep moat, and, in the event of this line of defence failing, towns in Gallipoli were provided with their own defences.

But Justinian had another way of dealing with the problems in the Danube basin. In accordance with traditional Roman tactics, he sought to divide and rule. The Lombards and the Gepids were two Germanic peoples who were the subjects of the emperor's duplicitous diplomacy. The capture of Sirmium by his old allies the Gepids and their subsequent hostile acts had been hard to take, and in response to this and the threat posed by Theudebert the Frank Justinian settled the Lombards, under their king Audoin, in Pannonia. When embassies from both peoples sought the aid of the empire in 548–549, Justinian decided for the Lombards, and, at least in the short term, he was well rewarded, for in 552 a substantial Lombard force made its way to Italy to help Narses in his showdown with the Goths. Later in the year further hostilities broke out between the Lombards and the Gepids, and again both sought the assistance of Justinian. Again he supported the Lombards, to whose assistance he sent a Roman force led by a general whose name, Amalafridas, indicates his membership of the old ruling family of the Ostrogoths, and indeed he was the great-nephew of Theoderic. Again, the Lombards were victorious over their enemies.

The principle was capable of infinite uses. In 545 Justinian proposed to the Antai that they settle in a town north of the Danube which had been built centuries earlier by the emperor Trajan, and enjoy the use of the surrounding lands. The town was in the old province of Dacia, which had been a part of the empire in the second and third centuries. But Justinian also committed himself to the payment of large sums of money

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to the Antai if they prevented the Huns (i.e. Bulgars) from entering the empire. More devious was his conduct in 551 towards two other groups who were apparently of Hunnic origin. He told the Utigurs, who were ravaging Roman lands, that they should be supporting the Romans in their strife with the Cotrigurs, who, despite being in receipt of Roman subsidies, were perpetually attacking Roman lands. The Utigurs were happy to oblige and defeated the Cotrigurs, but before long 2000 Cotrigurs crossed into Roman territory and were allowed to settle in Thrace. The Utigur ruler Sandilchus understandably took this badly, and sent ambassadors to complain to Justinian: why should the Cotrigurs be allowed to enjoy a life of leisure in the empire where they could get drunk, take baths and wear clothes with gold? Their case was unanswerable, but after Justinian had heard the ambassadors out he simply sent them on their way with fine words and a large quantity of gifts.

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SUCCESS IN THE SHORT TERM . . .

Justinian therefore mounted a series of attempts to solve the problems in the Danube area. It would be possible to argue that he did not succeed. The failure of any bishop from Moesia to attend the council of Constantinople in 553 may well indicate disturbed conditions, and, Procopius, writing in 550, offered a very negative evaluation of the situation. From the time Justinian took over the government of the Romans, he claimed, the Huns, Sklavinoi and Antai attacked Illyricum and Thrace, which he defines as the territory from the Adriatic Sea to the suburbs of Constantinople, nearly every year, killing or enslaving at least 200 000 Romans on each occasion (*Secret History* 18.20f). It is hard to imagine a more gloomy perspective, but there is no reason to take it seriously, for it comes in a passage in which the author claims that in Africa ten thousand times ten thousand times ten thousand people perished because of Justinian's activities (18.4; shortly afterwards the estimate is revised downwards to a scarcely more plausible figure of 5 000 000: 18.8), while the fate of Italy was even worse (8.13), and the plague which followed carried off about half the survivors (18.44)! The comments of Procopius in this passage are nothing more than an exercise in hyperbole.

But when, in about 554, he came to bring to an end the

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introductory material in the section of his *Buildings* which dealt with this area, Procopius' assessment of the situation was up-beat: because of Justinian's works, the barbarians who lived on the far side of the Danube were unable to cross the river (*Buildings* 4.1.14). Immediately before the list of forts in Thrace which concludes the book he is equally optimistic: the forts which Justinian founded throughout the area freed it completely from enemy attacks (4.11.20). Further, there is no reason to believe that Slavs were settling in Roman territory during the reign of Justinian. Archaeologists have found no evidence of Slav settlement there prior to the middle of the third quarter of the century, and attempts which have sometimes been made to identify Slavic forms lurking behind the placenames in the list of forts built or restored by Justinian which Procopius provides have failed: while some of the names are Celtic, and others of Germanic origin, there seem to be no names for which a Slavic origin can be plausibly argued. To be sure, there are oddities in the forms of the placenames given by Procopius, but these peculiarities can be explained by the author having had to turn the Latin names which he found in an original document into Greek.[7] The Danube provinces, then, remained firmly Roman.

It is therefore reasonable to see Justinian's measures as having largely contained the threat by the mid-sixth century. To be sure, there had been some displacement of the population: the evidence of coins suggests that a hill site near Sadovets which remained unoccupied throughout the fifth and early sixth centuries was again occupied during the reign of Justinian. But on the other hand, the people of Pirdop in Bulgaria seem to have completed their large church in brick during Justinian's reign.[8] In 545 the harvest in Egypt was poor, and it was clear that the grain which arrived in the royal city would not be enough for the needs of the capital, even after the fall in population caused by the plague. The praetorian prefect Peter Barsymes dealt with the problem by requisitioning grain from the nearby areas of Bithinia, Phrygia and Thrace, apparently foreseeing no difficulty in obtaining grain

7. V. Beševliev *Zur Bedeutung der Kastellnamen in Prokops Werk De aedificiis* Amsterdam 1970.
8. R.F. Hoddinott *Bulgaria in Antiquity: An Archaeological Introduction* London 1975 is a convenient presentation of some archaeological findings.

from the last-mentioned. Further, the years from 552 to 558 were free from attacks, and a tabulation of the coins in the museums of Serbia suggests that relatively peaceful conditions had existed in that area from the middle of the preceding decade.[9]

But the respite was only temporary. In March 559 a force of Cotrigurs and Sklavinoi, led by Zabergan, launched a major attack on imperial territory. The waters of the Danube had frozen, as sometimes occurred in that cold period, and the invaders rode their horses across the ice. One force advanced on Greece, to be repulsed at Thermopylai, while another part of the attacking host advanced on Gallipoli, only to be defeated by the wall which Justinian had built to protect the isthmus, which they were unable either to storm or sail around. In 540 invaders had penetrated the defences at both places, and their failure to do so in 559 was a tribute to the measures taken by Justinian. Meanwhile, Zabergan himself advanced towards the royal city with a force of cavalry estimated at 7000, plundering and taking captives as he advanced. The Long Wall, which may have been made less effective by an earthquake in 557, proved no obstacle; it was said that not even a dog barked by way of resistance. Justinian had committed many troops to Italy, Africa, Lazica and Egypt, and it was embarrassingly clear that there were not sufficient troops in the capital to deal with the emergency. Detachments of imperial guards, the scholarii, were available, but their function had long been merely ceremonial and they could not be expected to offer effective resistance; nor were members of the Blue and Green factions enough to deal with the threat. A mood of fear gripped the capital, and Justinian ordered that the churches outside the Theodosian walls were to be stripped of their costly ornaments. He finally dealt with the problem posed by Zabergan in an unexpected way.

Ever since his return from Italy in 549 Belisarius had been leading a quiet life in the capital. From Justinian's point of view, the services of this general had been a mixed blessing. His resolute action during the Nika rebellion, his victory over Gelimer and then his defeat of Vitigis were achievements for

9. The figures are tabulated by V. Popović, 'La Descente des Slaves et des Avars vers la Mer Égéé: Le Témoinage de l'archéologie' *Comptes rendus de l'Académie des Inscriptions et belles-lettres* 1978: 596–648 at 614.

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which his sovereign could only be thankful. Yet the possibility that he had harboured imperial ambitions on more than one occasion, and his failure to make headway against either the Persians or the Goths in the 540s, could only have led to resentment, as may the failure of Belisarius and Antonina to allow their daughter Ionannina to go ahead with a marriage to Theodora's grandson Anastasius. But in his hour of need Justinian called on the veteran, and Belisarius once more rode into battle. He was no longer a young man and he had at his disposal just over 300 troops, supported by untrained townspeople and peasants. But his tactical skill had not deserted him. When some 2000 enemy horsemen attacked, Belisarius brought it about that they were ambushed and then turned to flight. His victory, however, had a familiar sequel. There were those in Constantinople who said that Belisarius was aspiring to imperial office, and Justinian, yielding or pretending to yield to gossip as he had decades before, recalled the general before he could inflict more damage on the Huns.

After Easter, Justinian left the city to supervise the rebuilding of the Long Wall, remaining in Selymbria, a town on the Propontis, until August. The period he spent seeing to the repair of the wall was the longest period he is known to have spent outside Constantinople during his reign, a circumstance which suggests that he was not greatly concerned about a threat from Belisarius. He also ordered the strengthening of the fleet on the Danube. This could have prevented Zabergan from returning home, and the Hun came to terms with Justinian. These included the payment of an annual subsidy to the Cotrigurs, but Justinian felt it was an excellent outcome, and when he returned to Constantinople it was in triumph. Early on a summer morning he entered the city through the Gate of Charisius, towards the northern end of the Theodosian Wall. Unlike Belisarius on his return from Africa in 534, Justinian did not walk: he rode through crowded streets to the Church of the Holy Apostles, where he dismounted and lit candles by the tomb of Theodora.

After Zabergan retreated from the walls of Constantinople Justinian presented him with a sum of gold as a ransom for prisoners and an incentive to leave the territory of the empire. He thereupon wrote to his old ally, the gullible Sandilchus, who was also in receipt of imperial subsidies, claiming that Zabergan had made off with the gold which was to be paid to

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him. The only thing for Sandilchus to do, it was suggested, was to make war on Zabergan immediately. As soon as Zabergan crossed the Danube he was set upon by Sandilchus, who relieved him of his gold and booty. Thereafter there was persistent enmity between Cotrigurs and Utigurs, and the empire was safe from their attacks.

The strategy of sowing dissent among dangerous barbarians had some brilliant successes, but in the long term it was risky. It depended on the payment of money which need not always have been available, particularly given Justinian's penchant for expensive buildings, and it may not be accidental that when Procopius was writing his *Secret History* in 550 he made the desire of Justinian and Theodora to gain control of the assets of wealthy private citizens one of his main themes (3.19, 4.16, 4.33, 5.20, etc.). Some historians have felt that the class affiliation of the author caused him to exaggerate, but it may be that Procopius' own perception, that much of the wealth gained from citizens was expended on barbarians (especially 19.10, 13, 16), as well as unnecessary buildings, was accurate. The success of Justinian's policy also depended on the gullibility of the barbarians, who could hardly be blamed for seeking to exploit the system once they had experienced the generosity of the emperor.

Further attacks were launched by Huns in the spring of 562 which saw the town of Anastasiopolis captured, despite the activity in the field of Marcellus, one of Justinian's nephews. But by then a greater threat was emerging. In 558 envoys from the ruler of an Asiatic people, the Avars, arrived in Constantinople. They were fighters on horseback who had made contact with Justin, the son of Germanus, then the imperial general in Lazica. Modern scholars have often credited the Avars with the use of the stirrup, and it was clear that, in military terms, they posed a far greater threat than the Slavs.[10] People gazed in amazement at the envoys, whose long hair, fastened with ribbons and tied into plaits, looked frighteningly like snakes; it is possible that the fashion in which they wore

10. This point was not lost on other barbarian peoples. However we may account for the interest of the Slav and Bulgar peoples in Roman territory during the sixth century, it is clear that the Avars were differently motivated in their attacks and more powerful in military terms. On them, see W. Pohl *Die Awaren* Munich 1988.

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their hair owed something to their contact with the Chinese. In return for an alliance they sought land, gifts, and annual subsidies from Justinian. The emperor declined to grant them land but, as usual, was pleased to buy new friends. But the newcomers proved all too successful, and quickly established suzerainty over the Antai, Utrigurs and Cotrigurs. In 561 the Avars sent another embassy to Justinian with more ambitious demands: now they asked for land south of the Danube in Scythia, the modern Dobruja, ominously close to Constantinople. These were denied them, and an Avar plot to take the land by force was foiled by diplomacy. In the same year an Avar force attacked the Franks in Thuringia, an act which may perhaps be seen as an example of Justinian's far-reaching diplomacy, for at that very time Narses was mopping up Frankish resistance in Italy, and a diversion may have been opportune. But the Franks defeated their assailants, and the Avars were to remain a problem on the northern border of the empire.

The death of Justinian was followed by a radical change in policy in the Balkans. His successor, Justin II, issued a law in 566 which complained that the army had been deprived of resources, with the result that the state was toiling under countless invasions and attacks from barbarians. He denied them subsidies. It was a foolish move. In 567 the Avars and Lombards joined forces and won a mighty victory over the Gepids. But the Lombards were worried by the rising power of their allies, and in the following year these old friends of the empire invaded the recently won Italy. By the end of the century only one third of Italy remained in imperial hands. Worse was to follow in the Balkans. Coin hoards tell a story of mounting insecurity: Serbian museums hold 67 coins which passed out of circulation in the period 538/9–564/5, but their holdings for the reign of Justin (565/6–577/8) amount to 184.[11] Sirmium fell in 582, while Thessaloniki was besieged in 586 and again in about 615. In 626 a force of Avars and Slavs unsuccessfully besieged Constantinople itself. The proud town of Justiniana Prima was abandoned, apparently after a fire. The latest coin found on the site was minted in 615, by which time barbarians were among those living in the city. Niš had already fallen to Avars and the settlement of Slavs in what

11. Popović, 'La Descente': 614f.

had been imperial territory was proceeding apace. In desperation, Justinian's old policy of buying peace had been taken up again, and huge sums found their way to the Avars. In the seventh century they took to minting gold coins imitating those of the empire, and belt settings of solid gold were items of fashionable attire among them. When they were defeated by the Franks late in the eighth century their conquerors were astounded at the quantity of gold, silver and spoils the Avars had at their disposal. This was nothing more than a direct reflection of the failure of Byzantine policy in the Balkans.

The assessment of responsibility for these developments is a difficult exercise. Given that our written sources are Byzantine, one is naturally inclined to interpret them as a phase of Byzantine rather than Slavic or Avar history, in just the same way as the balance of our sources leads us to think of events in western Europe during the fifth century as 'the fall of Rome' rather than 'the rise of the Germanic peoples'. Perhaps the weakening of the position of the empire is to be explained not by its own feebleness but by factors specific to its enemies. In any case, it is clear that the position of the empire declined rapidly after the death of Justinian. Here, as elsewhere, a large part of our final assessment of his reign will be based on the degree to which we assign him the blame for the disasters which followed shortly after his death.

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Chapter 7

THE END AND BEYOND

In many respects the last years of the reign of Justinian saw the continuation of practices and policies long in place. Impressive buildings were still being erected. In the period 561–564 a large military complex which included a two-storey palace and a domed church on basilican lines was erected at Qasr ibn Wardan near the frontier in Syria, and at some time during the latter part of the reign an enormous bridge, 429 metres long and nearly ten metres wide, was flung over the river Sangarius, not far to the west of the royal city. After an earthquake of December 557 caused the collapse of the dome of the cathedral of Hagia Sophia in May 558, Isidore, a nephew of the Isidore of Miletus who had been involved in the original construction, presided over the construction of a new, somewhat higher dome. The church was reconsecrated on 24 December 562. Paul the silentiary, a poet also known for his skill in composing erotic verse, wrote a long, detailed poem in which he described the completed work. It seems to have been delivered on the feast of the Epiphany, 6 January 563.

Adherents of non-Christian religions could still expect rough treatment. In 551, having heard from the bishop of Caesarea that the Samaritans had calmed down, Justinian enacted a law which removed some of the disabilities which had been imposed on them at the beginning of his reign, while retaining incentives for them to convert. But in July 555 these feisty opponents of the imperial will, aided by Jews, rioted at Caesarea. They attacked churches and murdered the proconsul of Palestina Prima. Justinian sent against them one of his generals, Amantius, who enacted stern reprisals: some of the rioters were hanged, others lost their right hands, while

others saw their property confiscated. On another occasion Amantios visited Antioch, where pagans, Manicheans, astrologers and heretics felt his wrath. In the royal city pagans were arrested and forced to endure a parade of infamy; their books were burned.

Another theme of Justinian's reign to continue across the decades was the search for a lasting peace with Persia. Having come to power at nearly the same time, Justinian and Khusrau had grown old trying to take advantage of each other. After lengthy negotiations conducted by Peter the patrician and Isdigousnas, a treaty was concluded in 562. Lazica, which had remained a bone of contention, was to pass under Byzantine control, while Justinian agreed to pay just over 400 pounds of gold per annum, with the payments for the first seven years to be handed over as a lump sum in advance; when these years had passed the payments for the subsequent three years were also to be paid *en bloc*. The treaty was drawn up in meticulous detail. Among other matters, it dealt with the Arab allies of each party, who were not to make attacks, the conduct of trade between the states, and the status, always a problem, of the Roman town of Daras. The parties agreed that God would help those who abided by its terms and harm those who did not. A separate agreement concerned Christians living in Persia, who were accorded various liberties, including that of building churches, but were not allowed to convert the Magi. It is interesting to find Justinian concerning himself with the situation of Christians outside the empire, particularly given that most Christians in Persia were Nestorians.[1] But the result of the treaty was typical of those Justinian concluded. Although the parties had agreed that the treaty would expire on the three hundred and sixty fifth day of the fiftieth year, it lasted just ten years.

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SILK

In one area, however, the last years of Justinian's rule saw a

1. The detailed provisions of the treaty are known from R.C. Blockley ed. and trans. *The History of Menander the guardsman* Liverpool 1985 6.1. Menander had access to an account by Justinian's veteran negotiator Peter the patrician. On Justinian and the Nestorians of Persia, A. Guillaumont, 'Justinien et l'église de Perse' *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 1969f 23f pp. 39–66.

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major innovation. While the empire was largely self-sufficient, it imported a range of items which have a romance denied the more important and bulkier commodities traded internally. Chief among these was raw silk, an expensive item imported from China, where the silk worm had been domesticated at least two millennia previously. Silken clothes had connotations of luxury; Procopius took the taste which the Vandals developed while in Africa for wearing what he described as the Medic clothes nowadays called 'Seric' to be a sign of their decadence (*Wars* 4.6.7). An import of less importance was incense, for which southern Arabia was the traditional source. In pagan times it had been employed in the imperial cult, but the Bible seemed to give unquestionable authorization to its use in worship, and so it was undergoing a revival in Christian contexts. The costumes of the people depicted in the famous mosaics at S Vitale, and the thurifer who leads the procession of which Justinian is a member, suggest the uses to which these prestige products, for which the empire depended on foreign suppliers, could be put. Less dignified were spices, such as pepper and cinnamon, which played a role in the daily diet of the citizens of the empire similar to that they play in the diet of modern vegetarians. Barbarians as well as Romans came to value such items: Visigoths who besieged Rome early in the fifth century were given several thousand pounds of pepper, while a few decades later Indian pepper and dates were among the presents given to a widow of a king of the Huns. The empire produced a variety of spices, but some were imported from India and Indonesia.

Broadly speaking, the empire was linked to its suppliers by two routes. One of these proceeded by sea. The Alexandrian merchant and theologian Kosmas Indicopleustses is known to have sailed past Socotra, and he claimed to have sailed as far as Sri Lanka, where hoards of early Byzantine coins have been found.[2] From there goods originating in the east could be

2. We know of Kosmas' journeying through his work the *Christian topography* (ed. and trans. W. Wolska-Conus, *La Topographie chrétienne de Cosmas Indicopleustès*, Paris 1968–73; there is an older English translation by J.W. McCrindle, London 1897), in which he sought to disprove theories that the world is a sphere. Kosmas argued that it is shaped like the tabernacle which Moses instructed the people to build. A man of Nestorian convictions, he wrote against a gifted Monophysite thinker, John Philoponos.

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forwarded across the Indian Ocean and up the Red Sea, from which they would find their way to Alexandria, or up the Gulf, from which they would be transported overland through Persian territory to the empire. The other was the famous Silk Route. It proceeded by land westwards from China across the steppes, and made its way across Persian territory to the border with the empire, across which silk could be imported. Disparate as they were, the routes shared a major disadvantage: each was at the mercy of Persia. The heavy involvement of Persia in the silk trade is implied by Procopius' use of the word 'Medic' to describe silken garments. During times of war with Persia this was intolerable, and even in peace it was hard to bear, because Persia, never averse to profiting from the empire, levied an impost on the trade.

Justinian struggled to overcome this problem. He maintained Justin's policy of cultivating good relations with Axum, a state on the coast of the Red Sea to the south of Egypt. There could be no doubt that Axum, which had adopted the Christian religion, was a part of Africa (a Byzantine ambassador was astonished at the sight of a herd of some 5000 elephants), but the Semitic language spoken by its people was similar to that used in southern Arabia, and it maintained close connections with the Arabs across the Red Sea. Already, Justin had given naval support when a ruler of Axum, Elesboas, a Christian enthusiast who had adopted the biblical name Caleb, crossed the sea and invaded the Arab state of Himyar, located where Yemen is now. Elesboas, who wore a turban and went about in a carriage on top of four elephants, was a colourful ally, but no less exotic in his own way was the king of the Himyarites, Dhu-Nuwas, who had converted to Judaism and adopted the name Yusuf. It would certainly be possible to interpret the invasion mounted by Elesboas in a religious light, for after his success in Arabia he was an active builder of churches and obtained a bishop from Timothy, the patriarch of Alexandria who seems to have been an acquaintance of Theodora. The activity of Elesboas can also be seen as answering to a Roman strategy of putting pressure on the allies of Persia, and Justinian was later to attempt to inveigle the Himyarites into anti-Persian activity, to no avail. But there may have been more to his strategy than this. We know that Dhu-Nuwas caused trouble for Roman traders, and the war can also be seen as an attempt by a Roman ally to gain control of the straits leading

into the Red Sea. A few years afterwards Justinian sought to use the people of Axum to exclude Persian middlemen in the silk trade, but met with no success.

Another solution to the problem was the creation of a new overland route to the north of the Silk Route which would circumvent Persia. It may be that Justinian's interest in Lazica, where another war had been fought prior to the conclusion of peace with Persia in 562, was partly stimulated by his interest in such a route. But it would have involved a dangerous and long journey, for in the favourable conditions of the fourteenth century, the trip from the Crimea to Beijing lasted about nine months, and there is no sign that Justinian was able to make progress in this direction.

However, a major breakthrough was at hand. In the early 550s two monks came before Justinian, stating that they had been to a land to the north of India named Serinda, a word obviously connected with the name Procopius gave the clothes worn by the Vandals, 'Seric'.[3] There they had discovered that silk was made by worms, the eggs of which could be easily transported. Justinian asked them to return to Serinda and bring back eggs, which they did. This story is known from only one source (Procopius *Wars* 8.17.1–8), but there seems no reason to disbelieve it. Although silk continued to be imported, thanks to its capacity to produce it, the empire was no longer totally dependent on its suppliers. Earlier in his reign Justinian had established a state monopoly in the production of silk cloth. Trade had suffered badly during the war with Persia in the 540s, and the praetorian prefect Peter Barsymes[4] had brought about a state monopoly of the production of goods from silk. So it was that advances in production and manufacturing allowed the foundations of the great Byzantine silk industry to be laid.

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LAST YEARS

It is possible, then, to see in the last years of Justinian's reign

3. 'Seres' is the Greek for the suppliers of silk, and it is the root from which the English 'silk' is derived.
4. The name is a curious one, but Peter was a Syrian, so 'Bar' would have the force of 'son of'. Peter's father would therefore have been called Simeon.

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the continuation of themes which had been important earlier, and even a major new development. But they were also in a period of lengthening shadows. In 554 Constantinople was struck by an earthquake, during which the spear ominously fell from a statue of Constantine. The games held in May 556 to celebrate the anniversary of the foundation of Constantinople were marked by chanting against Justinian provoked by a shortage of bread; embarrassingly, an ambassador from Persia was present. The shortage lasted for three months. In December 557 Constantinople was struck by a major earthquake. An honorary consul was killed in his home by a piece of falling marble, but more important was the subsequent collapse of the dome of Hagia Sophia, a symbol of the confidence of the 530s. Justinian did not wear the stemma for 40 days, and customary Christmas celebrations were curtailed. An indication of the scale of the damage was given in 559 when the emperor, returning to the city in triumph after the withdrawal of the army of Zabergan, entered through the Gate of Charisius rather than the Golden Gate, through which the Via Egnatia made its way into the city. The unexpected route answered to the damage the earthquake had done along the lower part of the Mese.[5] In November 562 fights broke out at the cisterns. The city was suffering from a drought, the impact of which may have been exacerbated by failure to keep the aqueducts in a good state of repair. As if this was not enough, northerly winds prevented the grain fleet from reaching the city, and the patriarch enjoined religious observances.

Other parts of the empire also suffered from civil unrest. In Antioch, for example, there were disturbances involving orthodox and Monophysite Christians. But Constantinople was the worst affected. In November 561 trouble broke out between the Blues and Greens, and in the following year the anniversary games were marked by rioting and incendiarism, the house of the praetorian prefect Peter Barsymes being among the buildings destroyed. Some of the ringleaders were beheaded. In 563 Andrew, the prefect of the city of Constantinople, was himself attacked, and after further violence another holder of this office was dismissed in 565. Indeed, during the last few years of Justinian's reign there was an extraordinary turnover of prefects of the city, presumably

5. Michael McCormick *Eternal Victory* Cambridge/Paris 1986 p. 67.

reflecting desperate attempts on the emperor's part to maintain law and order in his capital.

Such conditions provided a natural background to political tension. One day in September 560 word spread around the city that Justinian's life had come to its end. He had returned from Thrace, perhaps after an inspection of defences, but because he was suffering from a headache he was seeing no-one. The bakeries were looted, and by nine o'clock there was no bread to be found anywhere in the city. Justinian had certainly been ill, and after he recovered a former praetorian prefect, Eugenius, accused two men, Aetherius and George, of having sought to replace him as emperor with Theodore, the son of one of his most respected and longest-serving civil servants, Peter the patrician. When enquiries proved the charge without foundation, Eugenius saved himself by taking refuge in a church.

A far more serious situation developed in November 562, when a plan to murder Justinian was uncovered. The plotters were Marcellus, a banker, Sergius, one of those whose names had been mentioned in connection with the alleged plot of 560, and a certain Ablabios, who was bribed to join the group. Their plan was breath-taking in its simplicity: one evening they would enter the palace and murder Justinian. Security certainly seems to have been lax at the palace; an earlier conspirator, Artabanes, is represented as having described Justinian as easy to murder, for he was in the practice of sitting late into the evening without a bodyguard in the company of elderly priests, unravelling the sayings of the Christians (Procopius *Wars* 7.32.9). But Ablabios passed word on to the military authorities. Marcellus was intercepted as he entered the palace with a dagger, which he then used to take his own life, while Sergius made his way in haste to a famous church, that of the Theotokos at Blachernai. Subsequently he implicated other people in the plot, claiming that Isaac, a moneylender who was associated with Belisarius, together with Vitus, another banker, and Paul, another associate of Belisarius, had all been involved.

For decades now Justinian had been worrying about Belisarius. Doubtless the thought that he could replace Justinian had passed through the general's mind, but there is no evidence that he ever took steps towards this end. Nevertheless, Justinian was alarmed. A round of questioning followed, as a result of which Belisarius himself was directly implicated.

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The various depositions were read out at a meeting held on 5 December, and Belisarius was placed under house arrest. In later centuries Justinian's response was exaggerated, stories being told that he blinded his old general, who ended his days as a beggar. But there was no more foundation to this charge than there had been to earlier ones, and Justinian soon relented. Belisarius was restored to favour in July 563, and died in March 565, beyond suspicion at last.

One of the reasons for this turmoil was the increasing unpopularity of Justinian, which can be traced through the various works of Procopius. A careful study of the figures which Procopius gave for the sizes of military forces in that part of his *Wars* dealing with the Goths suggests that, at the beginning of his narrative, he attempted to create a false picture of the degree of Belisarius' successes, but that as time passed he ceased to do so.[6] Perhaps he simply lost heart. By the time he completed Book 7 of the *Wars*, the last book of this work in which different theatres of war are treated separately, he had taken the story of the Gothic war up to early in 551, and the story told in the last stages of this book is indeed depressing. When he began work on Book 8 it was with a heavy heart.[7] This book narrates the triumph of Roman arms under Narses, but the war in Italy had dragged on far longer than its historian would have thought possible in the sunny days of 540, and his hero Belisarius had faded from the scene. Indeed, if there is a hero in Procopius' narrative of the last stages of the war against the Goths it is Justinian's enemy, the doomed but strangely attractive Totila.

But at the very time when the narrative of Book 7 of the *Wars* was drawing towards its conclusion, Procopius was working on his famous *Secret History*, the work which included the extremely negative characterization of Theodora we have already considered (above pp. 19-21). The book also displays a powerful animosity against Belisarius, whose wife Antonina is portrayed as a scheming and unfaithful spouse at whose feet her husband lay, on one memorable occasion, licking her

6. K. Hannestad 'Les Forces militaires d'après la Guerre gothique de Procope' *Classica et mediaevalia* 21 1960: 136–83.
7. The verbal echoes of *Wars* 8.1.1f in *Secret History* 1.1.1 (ed. and trans. H.B. Dewing, London 1914–1940), a work discussed immediately below, are clearer in the Greek than in the Loeb translation of Dewing.

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ankles, but it is even more hostile to Justinian. At one point Procopius casually notes that, among the emperors, Justinian looked most like Domitian (8.13), but he proceeds to state that no representation of Domitian had been allowed to survive, except for one preserved in Rome. It is possible that Procopius had seen the statue when he was in Rome, but the underlying point is surely an implication that Justinian was an emperor of such deplorable quality that it could simply be assumed that he looked like his dreadful predecessor.[8] He was described as walking about the palace late at night without his head, and more than once Procopius described him as the Prince of Demons (12.26, 12.32, 30.34), using precisely the form of words used by enemies of Jesus to refer to the Devil (e.g. Matt 9:34).

Procopius also transferred to Justinian accusations which in earlier writings he had levelled against others or only applied to Justinian in the mouths of other people. Interesting in this connection is his use of the adjective νεώτερος, a word which has the sense of 'revolutionary' or 'innovatory'. Together with its cognates it is used a number of times in the *Wars*, almost always carrying a negative connotation.[9] On one occasion it is applied to Justinian by his enemies, representatives of the Ostrogoths alerting Khusrau to his evil designs (*Wars* 2.2.6). But in the *Secret History* Procopius persistently applies the term to Justinian in a hostile sense (6.21, 8.26, 11.2, 30.21). He was now prepared to make the accusation of Justinian's enemies his own.

The historian had moved a long way from the early days when everything seemed possible. It would be interesting to know to what extent his loss of faith arose from the unexpectedly protracted length of the wars in the West, and if so to what extent his reaction was shared by other people. It would indeed have been curious if the cool response we have suggested the wars ultimately met with in the West had been matched by a perception in the East that they had turned out to be an expensive waste of time. Perhaps some of Procopius'

8. Averil Cameron *Procopius and the Sixth Century* London 1985 pp. 58f.
9. It is used of Khusrau the Persian king (*Wars* 1.23.1), of the charge made against Symmachus and Boethius before Theoderic (*Wars* 5.1.34), of disloyal Roman soldiers (*Wars* 7.1.25); it refers to the kind of activity Belisarius stated he had sworn never to engage in (*Wars* 6.29.20). It may be admissible to cite *Wars* 3.9.21 as well.

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sense of disillusionment also sprang from personal disappointment with Belisarius. But, while we have no reason to see Procopius as a typical figure whose changing views would have reflected those of his society at large, he is evidence for hostility towards Justinian occurring where it had not earlier in the reign, and as the emperor's life moved towards its close he was not the only person to demonstrate antagonism.

This feeling could have been connected with Justinian's slowing down. The restoration of Hagia Sophia had taken nearly as long as the erection of the original building. The flow of novels, the new laws which Justinian had published in such abundance in the years immediately after the Code had been issued, virtually ceased. During the 540s something like thirty-six were issued, but there were only thirteen during the 550s, and just three in the period 560–565. Increasingly, Justinian's thoughts turned towards religion. His last novel, issued a few months before he died, was concerned with ecclesiastical matters, and was bolstered with quotations from S Gregory the Theologian, S Basil, the council of Nicaea and S Paul. It could not be disputed that they were excellent authorities, but none of them had traditionally been cited on points of Roman law. As early as 548 the conspirator Artabanes poured scorn on Justinian for always sitting unguarded late into the night, discussing the contents of the scriptures with very elderly priests,[10] and as time passed his religious interests became stronger. A work written in praise of Justin II not long after Justinian died states that in his old age the emperor was completely cold; the love of the other life alone warmed him, and his mind was completely devoted to heaven (Corippus *In Laudem* 2:265–7). In October 563 he discharged a vow by journeying to Germia, a town in Galatia where there was a famous church dedicated to the archangel S Michael, and the bishop had various portions of the body of S George. It was an unexpected act for a man about eighty years old who had rarely left Constantinople.

10. *Wars* 7.32.9. Needless to say, the passage may express the sentiments of Procopius rather than Artabanes, but given that he was writing a few years later it can stand as indicative of feeling current at the time. In describing the priests as being in extreme old age, Procopius uses a favourite term: cf. *Wars* 7.39.7 (applied to Liberius when he was in his 70s or 80s), *Secret History* 9.50 (applied to Justin in his 70s).

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Oddly enough at the end of his life Justinian, who was so scrupulous with regard to correct Christian belief, tumbled into what almost everyone regarded as heresy.[11] Given that over four decades previously he had already been putting pressure on the pope to accept a theological formula to which he was partial, and that he had retained an intense interest in theological questions, it is not surprising that his mind continued to work along such lines. It is, however, surprising that the position he finally adopted was such an exceptional one. Justinian came to believe that the earthly body of Christ had been incorruptible and impassable, so that the manner in which Jesus ate after the resurrection was not different to the manner in which he had eaten before the crucifixion. It seemed to most people that this teaching, technically known as Aphthartodocetism, could not possibly be reconciled with the teaching of the council of Chalcedon that Christ had a perfect human nature, and even by Monophysite standards it was thought an extreme position. Of course, the events of the Three Chapters controversy had made it clear that Justinian had means of making clerics see his point of view. Nevertheless, when the patriarch of Antioch was invited to adhere to the emperor's position, he prepared to resist, and Eutychius, the patriarch of Constantinople, had no trouble in showing that Justinian's views were heretical.

But Eutychius, who had risen to the office of patriarch so quickly in 552, had enemies.[12] In 558 he had been required to co-operate in an investigation into a plot against Justinian, and in January 565 two senators were on hand to turn Justinian against him. They were an unsavory pair, for one of them, Addeus, was later to admit to having killed a praetorian prefect by sorcery, while the other, Aetherius, had been among those accused by Eugenius of plotting against Justinian in 560. It is now impossible to disentangle the roles which concerns about doctrine and the jockeying for position, which must have become increasingly intense as Justinian grew older, respectively played in the affair. But Eutychius was quickly banished, to be replaced in office by the representative

11. It is strange to find A. Gerostergios *Justinian the Great Emperor and Saint* Belmont Mass 1982 denying this lapse into heresy by the emperor.
12. P. Van der Ven 'L'Accession de Jean le scholastique au siège patriarchal de Constantinople en 565' *Byzantion* 35 1965: 320–52 is helpful.

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in Constantinople of the church of Antioch, John the scholastic. Not for the first time in Justinian's reign, high office was thrust upon an ecclesiastic who happened to be in the capital seeing to the interests of another see. John, however, enjoyed close relations with Justin, the son of Justinian's sister, who would clearly have strong claims to the throne when the emperor died. In line with his customary way of seeing Christian doctrine as a concern of the state, Justinian expressed his new convictions in an edict, but before the new patriarch was placed in the embarrassing position of having to declare himself on the issue the emperor died.

The difficulties which attended Justinian's last years were not merely the consequence of unpopularity and his attention being less taken up with earthly matters. It was clear to everyone that before long there would be a new emperor, and, inevitably, parties formed. A lot of trouble would have been avoided had Justinian nominated a successor, but the canny old man failed to take a step that would have weakened his own position. So it was that, whereas it had become perfectly clear in the 520s that he would succeed his uncle Justin, no-one could be sure who would follow Justinian on the throne. His marriage had been childless,[13] although even if Justinian and Theodora had produced a son, he need not have succeeded his father, for succession by a son was not automatic; the last son to succeed his father in the East had been Theodosius II, early in the fifth century. Justinian's cousin Germanus would have been a strong candidate, and it may be that when Justinian named him as commander of what was to be the definitive campaign against the Ostrogoths in 550 his plan was for Germanus to become a junior emperor, technically a 'caesar', residing in Italy, with a view to assuming responsibility for the entire empire when the senior emperor died. But the death of Germanus in 550 would have put an end to thoughts along such lines.

13. Theodora was already a mother when she married Justinian. She had a son, John, whose father had taken him away to Arabia, but when he came to Constantinople and made himself known to Theodora at the palace she is said to have caused him to disappear. She was also the mother of a daughter, who herself bore a son, Anastasius. In 548 he married Ioannina, the daughter of Belisarius, but on the death of Theodora later in the year Ionnina's mother separated them. We know that she had another grandson, Athanasius, who became a monk.

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Two strong contenders remained. One of them was Justin, the son of Germanus by his first wife and hence a relative of Justinian. He had enjoyed a successful military career, having held commands in the Danube region and Lazica, and in the early 560s was making a name for himself by his energetic steps against the Avars. But his series of postings away from the capital meant that he was unable to intervene in its political life to his own advantage, while his loyalty ensured that he would not be one of those generals whose response to being passed over took the form of war.

The other likely candidate, and as it turned out the successful one, also bore the name Justin. He was the nephew of Justinian, being the son of his sister Vigilantia, and had married well, for his wife Sophia had all the ability and resourcefulness of her aunt, Theodora.[14] His record was certainly not as distinguished as that of his namesake. Nowhere is he mentioned in the voluminous writings of Procopius, and the office he had held since 552, *cura palatii*, was a modest one. But it placed him in control of the palace and gave him the inestimable advantage of being on the scene. The holy man Simeon the Stylite was later said to have predicted his accession, and a Monophysite historian was to write that Sophia transferred from the communion of the Monophysites to that of the Chalcedonians with a view to easing her husband's passage to the throne, three years before this occurred. These stories may be true, or they may simply reflect tales which spread after Justin had become emperor. Corippus, in a work he wrote in praise of Justin, claimed that during his last years Justinian had done nothing without the counsel of Justin, and on numerous occasions metaphorically refers to Justinian as Justin's father. But the author of a work celebrating Justin may be suspected of having sought to invest his accession with an inevitability it may not have had in reality. It may be more significant that Justin was the patron of one Tiberius, the leader of the bodyguard, the very office which Justin had used as his launching pad to the purple in 518. Neither had Justin lost anything by the appointment of his friend John the

14. Vigilantia had two other children, Marcellus and Praeiecta; the latter, as we have seen, was successively married to Areobindus and John, a relative of Anastasius. But neither is known to have entered into the calculation in 565.

scholastic as patriarch early in 565 in a manoeuvre which may have had political overtones. He was certainly well-positioned to succeed his uncle, and as it turned out his coming to power was straightforward.

Justinian died on the night of 14 November 562.[15] While it was still dark the only witness of his death, an elderly patrician, Callinicus, made his way to the palace of Justin and Sophia in the presence of senators. The news he transmitted, whether accurately or not, was that he had heard the dying emperor name Justin as his successor. From there the party made its way to the imperial palace. They entered it as the birds were singing, and were made welcome by Tiberius and the guard. Having been crowned with a torque and raised on a shield, Justin was then crowned by the patriarch John. Only when these military and religious ceremonies had been completed and he had received the acclamations of those present in the palace did Justin proceed to the Hippodrome, where a crowd had gathered on news of the death of Justinian. There, as he took his seat in the kathisma, the factions acclaimed the new emperor. One has the feeling that the whole operation was managed very smoothly with a view to an uncontested succession. After this had been secured the body of Justinian was placed in a sarcophagus, and a funeral procession made its way amid crowds of people from the palace down the Mese to the church of the Holy Apostles, where it was placed in a mausoleum he had built in its precincts. There it remained, to be discovered by members of the fourth crusade in 1204.

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FOR GOOD OR ILL

Justinian was buried in an embroidered funeral pall which Sophia, already displaying qualities which were later to stand the empire in good stead, conveniently had ready. While Corippus states that the pall depicted the whole series of Justinian's labours, the only scene he describes was one portraying Justinian in his court treading the king of the Vandals underfoot. The event alluded to what had occurred over thirty

15. Our source for the following events is Corippus, who may be suspected of endowing the accession of Justin with a degree of inevitability it did not have (*In Landem Justini Augusti Minoris* ed. and trans. Averil Cameron, London 1976)

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years previously. When Justin and Sophia went on to sit down to a ceremonial banquet the gold plate on the table depicted scenes which Justinian had ordered to be displayed in 534. From the brooch which fastened the chlamys Justin put on hung jewels from Ravenna and Africa, presumably spoils from the Gothic and Vandal treasures conveyed to Constantinople after the victories of Belisarius. Was it really the case that nothing worth while had happened since 540? Indeed, could it be said that the reign of Justinian had ultimately dragged on far too long?

By 565 the empire was quite different from what it had been in 527. Constantinople had become central to its life in a way it never had been before. Most of our study of Justinian has been set in the royal city. This has been fitting, given that its subject rarely travelled beyond its walls, and reflects the emphasis given the metropolis in our sources, but it may have exaggerated the role of the capital within the empire. Any such distortion, however, will have become progressively smaller over the course of our study. We have seen the ceaseless flow of talented people from the provinces to the capital, where their skills were put to use designing buildings, recasting the laws, and administering the affairs of the empire. The city was a magnet for ambitious careerists and the scions of impoverished western families alike. In 533 the teaching of law was restricted to Rome, Constantinople and Beirut, but by the end of the reign it was clear that only the second had a future as a centre of legal studies, and by the middle of the century the city had come to hold sway as the undisputed centre of not only Greek but also, more surprisingly, Latin literature. The styles of architecture and liturgy fashionable in the capital would increasingly tend to influence the provinces. Justinian deserves much of the credit for the centrality his capital came to enjoy, as he does for the buildings with which it was adorned by the end of his reign, although there is no disguising the religious nature of those for which he was responsible, a characteristic such as to suggest to one eminent scholar the announcement of what he saw as the coming of the middle ages.[16]

Justinian's reign saw the beginning of a grim period in

16. Cyril Mango, *Le Développement urbain de Constantinople (IVe–VIIe siècles)* Paris 1985, p. 52.

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intellectual life.[17] This was particularly true in the secular sphere. In Italy, fewer secular manuscripts were produced under Justinian than had been under the Goth Theoderic, and, strange to say, after the defeat of the Goths the production of Greek texts in northern Italy almost dried up. In the East secular books had enjoyed a lively circulation during the reigns of Anastasius and Justin, but not one text of an ancient Greek author is known to have been produced in Constantinople during the reign of Justinian. Oddly enough, more Latin manuscripts seem to have been produced there during the sixth century, but this may have been an aspect of the refocusing of Latin-based intellectual life which occurred during the Gothic war, and hence at least in part a consequence of the catastrophic state of Italy for which Justinian was to blame. The production of Christian texts held up comparatively well, but legal texts constituted the only area of growth.

We may therefore speak of a remarkable constriction of intellectual life during this period. Confronted with the intellectual sway of Christianity in the medieval period, and the success it had come to enjoy in the West by the early sixth century, one can easily underestimate the importance of secular and explicitly non-Christian modes of discourse within the empire at the beginning of Justinian's reign. The thinkers who had participated in the revival of non-Christian thought in the century prior to the migration of the seven philosophers to Persia were far more than summarizers, eptimators and commentators. But the lofty tradition they represented did not have a bright future. The pagan scholars who returned from Persia were indeed free to continue their work at Harran, but the town was scarcely central to the life of the empire.

It is not easy to account for these developments. Doubtless they were connected with the strengthening impress of Christianity, which can be demonstrated in such developments as the rising tide of Marian piety. The feast of the Presentation of the Lord was first celebrated in Constantinople on 2 February 542, and as we have seen many churches were dedicated to the Theotokos in this period. Similarly, the building of a shrine to SS Priscus and Nicholas by Justinian seems to

17. For the following I draw on G. Cavallo 'La circolazione libraria nell' età di Giustiniano' in G.G. Archi ed. *L'imperatore Giustiniano storia e mito* Milan 1978 pp. 201–36.

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constitute the first evidence we have for the cult of the latter, who was to become one of the most loved saints of the Christian East. The tendencies operating in intellectual life involved both a contraction in overall scope and an intense flourishing of the genres into which intellectual energies were now poured.[18] It was simply the fact that many members of the generation of Romanos Melodos, while happy to accept secular and frankly mythological themes in visual arts, thought they had better things to do than concern themselves with the content of classical literary culture.[19] The increasing role of monasteries in intellectual life may also be relevant, for it would be reasonable to expect that the religious concerns of the transmitters of books were reflected in the kinds of books that were copied. The field of history ceased to attract authors in the early seventh century, with the unfortunate result that the rise of the Arabs in that century is described in contemporary accounts written in Egypt and Armenia, but not the surviving parts of the empire. Only in the early ninth century was a revival of historical writing to take place.

No-one could blame Justinian for these broad developments, but it must be said that he was a more than willing participant.[20] His campaigns against pagans, of which execution and suicide were results, the parade of infamy which suspects had to undergo, and, most ominously for intellectual history, book burnings, pointed the way to a grim future, and the society over which he presided came to be characterized by fear in some respects.[21] There must have been thinkers who

18. See, with particular reference to the West, Robert Markus *The End of Ancient Christianity* Cambridge 1990 p. 225.
19. This is not to deny that the vocabulary, syntax and general style of the works of Procopius are of an intensely classical nature, but by the early seventh century it was clear that the future lay along other paths. The sixth-century items published in K. Weitzmann ed. *The Age of Spirituality* New York 1979, include numerous sixth-century examples of Greek gods, popular heroes and mythological themes; further, it is clear that production of items with such themes was to continue.
20. Interesting is the perspective of Zonaras: Justinian spent the money which had formerly been used to pay the salaries of teachers in all the towns on the construction of churches, so causing ignorance (*Epitome* 14.6.31f, ed. M. Pinder 1897).
21. See the comments of Roger Scott 'Malalas, *The Secret History* and Justinian's propaganda' *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 39 1985 pp. 99–109.

trimmed their sails to the wind. One wonders as well about the control the state exercised over the sources of knowledge. Justinian's first edict against the Three Chapters, for example, issued in 543–544, does not survive; perhaps care was taken that it did not. Documents written by deviate Christians were hard to get hold of: Leontius of Byzantium found it difficult to gain access to a copy of a book by Theodore of Mopsuestia, because custodians were reluctant to let the uninstructed see it.[22] Such policies could only make intellectual life more narrow. It could plausibly be argued that, even though the patronage of Justinian had brought about a flourishing of some kinds of literary production in the sixth century, his long-term influence in this area was negative.

This is not the only important area in which Justinian's policies constituted a clear break with tradition. The amalgamation of civil and military authority which he established in various areas defied late Roman practice, and anticipated the developments of later centuries, as did the rising authority he was prepared to concede bishops in their towns.[23] Increasingly, the military man and the bishop would be the holders of power in the regions. For medieval historians there is a tendency to take this, together with the Christianizing of intellectual life, for granted, and to see it as a kind of inevitable development, but it is worth insisting on the fact that during the reign of Theoderic (493–526) secular letters flourished in Italy, as evidenced by the extraordinary achievement of Boethius, just as the traditional separation of civil and military powers was adhered to fairly rigorously. Judged by such criteria, the Roman emperor anticipated the middle ages more than the barbarian king, and, paradoxically, the reabsorption of Italy into the empire took it away from classical ways.

Yet there is a further irony. These developments occurred in the reign of an emperor whose legal reforms, laws and wars were sometimes rhetorically justified as restoring the past. Indeed, such activities have sometimes formed the basis for estimates of Justinian as an arch-conservative motivated by the desire to revive old ways. But caution is called for. Not all the

22. *Patrologia Graeca* 86:1384.
23. A revealing case in G. Dagron 'Two documents concerning Mesopotamia' in A.E. Laiou-Thomadakis ed. *Charanis Studies* New Brunswick NJ 1980?: 19–30.

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projects he energetically set under way in the years immediately following his accession were classical in tenor, and the reform of the laws began by imitating the work of Theodosius II; only when the first edition of the Codex had been published and a lawyer of great abilities, Tribonian, had come to light did Justinian set under way the greater work of the Digest. There is no need to see the justifiable boasting which announced the completion of the Digest as indicating the frame of mind with which work on the laws was begun. Similarly, there is no need to see the western wars as having been launched in accordance with a great strategy to restore the lost provinces of the empire, whatever hyperbole may have attended their success; it was simply the fact that contingent and unforeseen circumstances in Africa and then Italy confronted Justinian with possibilities which he exploited in an opportunistic way. Despite the rhetorical language in which they were described, neither Justinian's legal work nor the wars in the West can be seen as having been prompted by a great vision of restoration.

The period after the death of Justinian was one of intense change for the empire. Reacting against the apparently supine policies of his predecessor, Justin took a firm line and refused to pay the subsidies Justinian had extended to various barbarian peoples. Doubtless the step was prompted by financial considerations, for which the spend-thrift policies of Justinian must bear some of the blame. Whether directed towards buildings, Khusrau, or military expeditions, a lot of money had flowed from the treasury during Justinian's reign, and in 566 Justin complained that it was burdened with obligations but contained only a little.[24] His change in policy, however, was followed by military disasters, which meant that civilians like Justinian and himself were no longer appropriate heads of state. Within a decade of his death effective power was being wielded by a military man, and a line of soldier emperors was to follow.

They had their work cut out for them. As we have seen, it

24. Justin's complaint: novel 149pr. Note as well the comments of John of Nikiu on Justinian's generosity: *Chronicle* 90.50f trans. R.H. Charles, London 1916.

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became impossible to hold the Danube frontier, and before long Slavic peoples had gone beyond raiding and begun to settle in the Balkans in large numbers. In 568 Italy was invaded by the Lombards, who had succeeded in occupying some two-thirds of it by the end of the century. Early in the following century Persians surged over the eastern parts of the empire; goalposts were erected in the Hippodrome at Gerasa so they could play polo. A mighty effort by the emperor Heraclius (610–641) was enough to drive them out of imperial territory but the latter part of his reign saw the beginning of the rise of the Arabs, newly converted to Islam. By the end of the seventh century they had brought under their power a good half of the Mediterranean coastline, extending from the eastern part of the modern Turkish coastline to northern Spain, a great arc of territory which included the wealthiest parts of the empire. The bulk of these were never to be regained. Already they were beginning the massive re-orientation which would see them turn away from the Mediterranean and become subsumed in a territorial block centred from the 660s on the inland city of Damascus and, from the mid-eighth century, on far-away Baghdad. The Slavicization of most of the Balkans and the Arabization of the Middle East and north Africa developments which meant that henceforth these lands would dance to rhythms so different from those to which they had become accustomed in classical times, were set in train comfortably within a century of the death of Justinian.

The proper context in which these developments should be seen remains tantalizingly obscure. But it seems likely that the momentous changes which followed the Arab conquest occurred in those lost provinces of the empire which had been improving their relative economic position. Much of our evidence for this is archaeological, and there can be no doubt that work still to be done will modify current understandings. Nevertheless, it is hard to escape the conclusion that in the sixth century the different parts of the empire were moving apart in terms of their prosperity. In post-conquest Italy economic decline which had set in centuries earlier was exacerbated by the Gothic war. The show-piece building erected at Ravenna should not blind us to the limited nature of building activity in sixth-century Italy, the inhabitants of which displayed an extraordinary commitment to the recycling of centuries-old buildings, or components of them

rather than the erection of new ones, and the decline in urban populations was apparent to an observer such as Cassiodorus (*Variae* 8.31, 11.39). In Thrace and Dacia, it has been suggested that important deviations from the classical lay-out of cities were under way.[25] The pattern is different for Constantinople, founded comparatively recently and the recipient of much imperial largesse in the time of Justinian, but it was to follow the western regions into decline: whereas 92 monasteries are known to have existed in the royal city in the sixth century, just two were founded during the seventh and eighth centuries.[26] Further to the east, however, it was a different story. Antioch seems to have been rebuilt on a moderate scale after the Persian sack in 540, and excavations at a site inland from the city reveal a flourishing economy based on traditional Mediterranean mixed cultivation. Here, the most expensive houses were those built in the sixth century, with a slow decline only setting in by the beginning of the seventh century.[27] In other words, the lost territories, which included the wealthy Egypt, were precisely the ones an emperor would have wished to hold.

Such evidence is very hard to evaluate. Perhaps the relative economic strength of the eastern regions can be seen as having been connected to the main political developments of the late-antique world, which can be summed up in the move of the centre of power steadily westwards: from Rome, in the centre of the Mediterranean, it passed to Constantinople,

25. V. Velkov *Cities in Thrace and Dacia in Late Antiquity* Amsterdam 1977 p. 231f.
26. Peter Charanis 'The monk in byzantine society' *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 25 1971 pp. 61–84 at 65f. The figures are based on the data supplied in the first edition of R. Janin *La géographie ecclésiastique de l'empire buzantine* 1 *Le siège de Constantinople et le patriarchat œcumenique* 3 *Les églises et les monastères* 2nd edn Paris 1969, and I wish to record that I have found this work most useful, despite its flaws. Of course both the military situation of the city and the degree of documentation was different during the centuries following Justinian.
27. On Antioch I follow J. Lassus, *Antioch-on-the-Orontes* 5 Princeton 1972, who is more optimistic than G. Downey *A History of Antioch in Syria* Princeton 1961. The inland site is discussed by J.-P. Sodini, G. Tate, B. et Swantje Bavant, J-L. Biscop and D. Orssaud. 'Déhès (Syrie du Nord) campagnes I–III (1976–1978) Recherches sur l'habitat rurale' *Syria* 57 1980: 1–304, proposing revisions to the classic study of G. Tchalenko *Villages antiques de la Syrie du Nord* Paris 1958.

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thence to the Umayyad caliphate based in Damascus, and ultimately to the purpose-built Abbasid capital of Baghdad on the Tigris. It may not be coincidental that the most interesting churches erected anywhere in the Christian world in the seventh century were those built in Armenia. It would take centuries for the Mediterranean to regain its centrality in the lives of many of those living around it, and for the surviving rump of the empire to regain its morale.

And so we may return to the question foreshadowed at the end of the preceding chapter. To what extent can Justinian be held to blame for these developments? It has been argued that the rise of the Arabs, often seen as bringing about the end of late antiquity, was not so much a cause as a consequence of changes.[28] If this were to be accepted, and the changes seen as arising from imperial policies as well as such phenomena as earthquakes and the plague, the point would gain in force. Perhaps the resources Justinian lavished on the building of churches would have been better spent on the army; perhaps the military adventures in the West were a diversion of money and energies which compromised the empire's ability to defend itself. The *Notitia Dignitatum*, a text of the early fifth century, records that some 170 000 troops were stationed in the East and Africa, Pannonia and Italy, but Agathias estimated that the strength of the army had dwindled to barely 150 000 soldiers late in Justinian's reign (*Histories* 5.13). In other words, by the end of his reign the army defending the whole empire was smaller than the force which had not been able to hold the area during the preceding century.[29] Yet the plague, for which Justinian could hardly be held to blame, may have had much to do with this. More generally, it is surely the case that attempts to explain the major developments of the late sixth and seventh centuries should be located in a framework which gives weight to the strengths of the victors as well as the better-documented weakness of the defeated. Once this is done, Justinian's responsibility for the losses suffered by the empire is hard to establish.

28. See the important studies by Hugh Kennedy, 'From Polis to Madina: Urban change in late antique and early Islamic Syria' *Past and Present* 106 1985: 3–27, and 'The last century of Byzantine Syria: A reinterpretation' *Byzantinische Forschungen* 10 1985: 141–83.
29. A.H.M. Jones *The Later Roman Empire 284–602* Oxford 1964 p. 684.

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In any case, Justinian's western conquests were evanescent, and it is hard to see how they could have been anything else. The toehold achieved in Spain fell to the strong Visigothic monarchy of the early seventh century, Africa was being eroded by the Moors before the coming of the Arabs, and it was beyond the resources of the empire to defend the greater part of Italy against the Lombards. The wars have certainly attracted attention at subsequent times: in 1470 the Italian humanist Leonardo Bruni produced a book on the Italian war against the Goths which was basically a reworking into Latin of the account of the Gothic war by Procopius.[30] But his concern may have been connected with the situation of Italy when he was writing. There could be no doubt that the wars in the West were, in the long term, an expensive diversion from the forward path of medieval history.

If we seek the positive aspects of Justinian's legacy we will look in two other directions. The beautiful church of S Marco in Venice was built during the eleventh century in imitation of the church of the Holy Apostles in Constantinople, but the most influential of Justinian's buildings was the greatest. After a visit in 1869, Mark Twain disparagingly referred to Hagia Sophia as 'the rustiest old barn in heathendom',[31] but his is a minority opinion, for century after century the building has continued to work its spell. Pieces of evidence can be accumulated, almost at random. In the eighth century it was felt that a church which a Lombard duke of Benevento had erected was a likeness of Justinian's church; it was said that in the tenth century a celebration of the liturgy there was enough to dispose Russian envoys, who allegedly did not know whether they were in heaven or on earth, to accept orthodox Christianity; in the eleventh century envy of this work was believed to have stimulated an emperor to erect a church which he hoped would be finer; in the twelfth century abbot Suger of S Denis was concerned at comparisons between his church and Hagia Sophia. Members of the fourth crusade, which captured Constantinople in 1204, were impressed, although

30. Leonardo Aretino *De bello Italico adversus Gothos* Foligno 1470, which was itself translated into English by Arthur Goldyng: *The Historie of Leonard Aretine, concerning the warres betweene the Imperialles and the Gothes fro the possession of Italy* London 1563.
31. Cited in R.J. Mainstone *Hagia Sophia* New York 1988 p. 12.

the comment of one of them, Robert of Clari, that Saint Sophia meant 'Holy Trinity' is devastating evidence for the ignorance of the crusaders. But the greatest compliment to Justinian's masterpiece was paid in his own city, following its capture by the Turks in 1453. The impact of Hagia Sophia brought about a re-orientation in Turkish architecture which came to its fruition in the work of the great architect Sinan, whose large-domed mosques can still be seen at Erdine as well as Constantinople, while the slightly later Mosque of Sultan Ahmed (the 'Blue Mosque') seems to stand in conscious rivalry to the nearby Hagia Sophia.[32] The money lavished on the church continued to have an impact beyond the Byzantine period.

Justinian's legal work also lived on. Thanks to the decline in the knowledge of Latin as well as the inherent quality of the work for which he was responsible, his legislative enterprise would hereafter always stand between classical Roman law and any Byzantine present. A Greek version of the Institutes was available as early as 534, and in various forms it continued to influence Byzantine law for centuries; the Basilika issued by Leo VI, probably in 888, is largely based on Justinian's works. But its destiny in the West was to be more important. Quoted by Gregory the Great, used in the following centuries in the Byzantine-held parts of Italy, and known to the Lombards, it nevertheless came to play its historical role only after the Byzantine political presence in Italy had come to an end. Astonishingly, a sixth-century text of the Digest was being used by Italian scholars at the end of the eleventh century, and the revival of civil law which later occurred, first in Italy and then elsewhere, would have been unthinkable without Justinian's work. Western emperors such as Frederick Barbarossa and Frederick II saw to the insertion of some of their laws into copies of the Codex, and Justinian's legislative work has been influential in European law until recent times. It was Justinian's achievement in the field of law which won the admiration of Dante in the early fourteenth century. In his *Paradiso* (6:10–27), the Florentine poet describes Justinian, in heaven, explaining that pope Agapetus had converted him from believing that Christ had only one nature. Thereafter he sent

32. It must be said, however, that antecedents to this style are to be found in earlier Turkish buildings.

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Belisarius off to war and devoted himself to working on the laws. The description of Justinian's activities is, of course, inaccurate and chronologically woeful, but it is an interesting pointer to the concerns of Dante: for him, Justinian was significant for his legal work rather than his wars, even though Dante was partial to the idea of an imperial invasion of Italy.

Justinian's Nachleben, as opposed to the fate of his achievements, is complex and far from properly understood. Early opinions as to the fate of the emperor after death varied,[33] and by the seventh century strange stories about him and Belisarius were being told in Frankland.[34] Some later Byzantine authors, such as Zonaras, provide details concerning his reign unknown from earlier sources, and it is difficult to establish whether these are based on trustworthy sources of information or whether they reflect unreliable traditions which had grown up. Obviously, the opinions people had concerning Justinian would have reflected the sources of information available to them, and so a proper study of Justinian's posthumous reputation would encompass such matters as the manuscript tradition of the various works of Procopius. In 703 a Khazar princess who married Justinian II took the significant name Theodora, but a description of Constantinople written early in the eighth century has scarcely anything to say of the great contribution of his predecessor to the city.[35]

Today we are in a different situation. If every generation finds its own concerns mirrored in the past, it may be significant that books are being written on Theodora, and that Gore Vidal, the author of several interesting works on classical themes, has recently written the screenplay for a film on her, to be directed by Martin Scorsese. But acknowledgment that

33. That he went to heaven: Corippus *In Iaudem Justini Augusti minoris* 1.245f (ed. and trans. Averil Cameron, London 1976. That he went to hell: Evagrius *Historia Ecclesiastica* 5.1 (*The Ecclesiastical History of Evagrius*, ed. J. Bidez and L. Parmentier, London 1898; trans. E. Walford, London 1851) See in general J. Irmscher 'Justinianbild und Justiniankritik im frühen Byzanz' in H. Köpstein and F. Winkelmann eds *Studien zum 7. Jahrhundert in Byzanz. Probleme der Herausbildung des Feudalismus* Berlin 1976 pp. 131–42.
34. G. Schreibelreiter, 'Justinian und Belisar in fränkischer Sicht' in *BYZANTIOΣ Fest. H. Hunger* Vienna 1984: 267–80.
35. Eds and trans. Averil Cameron and Judith Herrin *Parataseis syntomoi chronikai* Leiden 1984.

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the preoccupations of the present affect our approach to the past need not drive us towards a kind of presentist solipsism. The achievements of Justinian have their own solidness, and I believe that at least one of his personal characteristics can still be detected. For good or ill, Justinian was a restless man. He was wakeful, being described in the preface to an important piece of legislation as giving thought to the welfare of his subjects into the nights, as if it were day (novel 8pr.), and was well known for getting by on a limited amount of sleep.[36] The initiator of a whirlwind of reforms in the late 520s and 530s, the flinger-up of impressive buildings over an astonishingly wide area, the sender of generals to make war in unlikely places, and the canny manipulator of ecclesiastics was the same person who, late in life, prowled around the palace by night and sat up until all hours probing into questions of theology and who, in his last months, thought that he had found the long-desired solution. Here, as occasionally elsewhere, he had misread the situation. But there can be no mistaking the energies which continued to carry this extraordinary man, then over eighty, into new directions.

36. For example, Procopius *Secret History* 13.28, 30 (cf. *Buildings* 1.7.8f ed. and trans. H.B. Dewing, London 1914–1940), 15.11; John the Lydian *Powers* 2.15 fin (ed. and trans. A.C. Bandy *On Powers* Philadelphia 1983); and the reference to him as 'sleepless' in an inscription (*Corpus Inscriptionum Graecarum* 8639, line 9 ed. E. Curtius and A. Kirchhoff, repr. Hildesheim/New York 1977).

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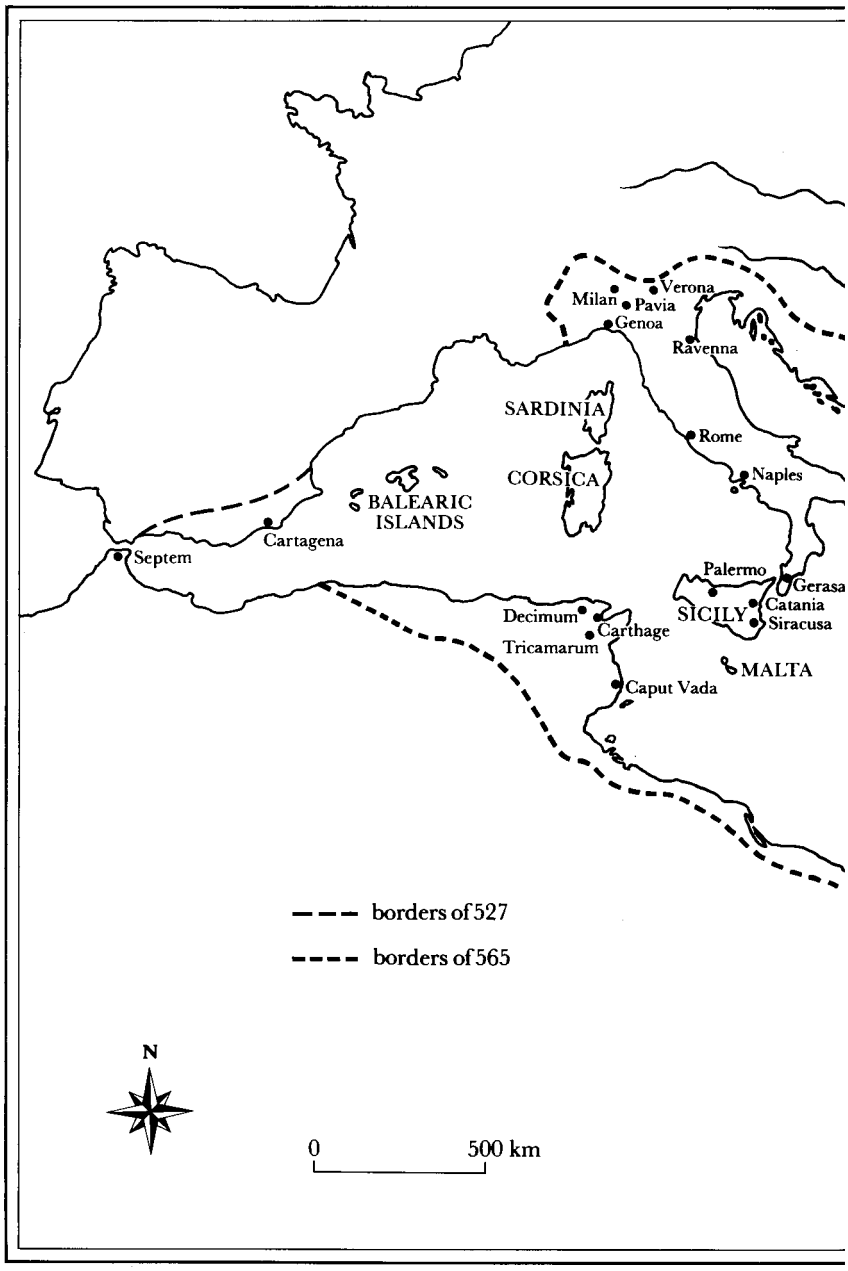

The empire under Justinian

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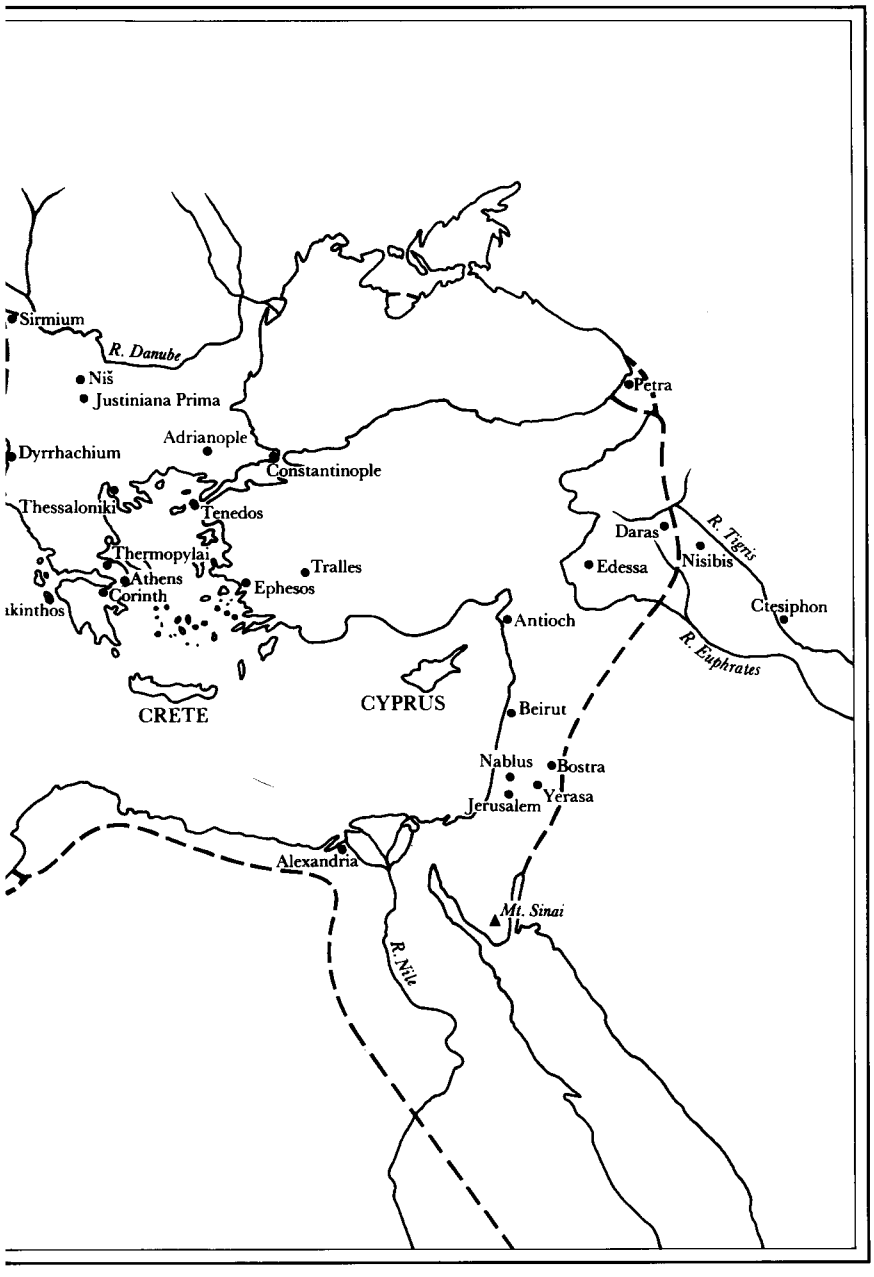

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Abbreviations: Alex. = Alexandria, Cp = Constantinople, emp. = emperor, kg = king, pat. = patriarch, bp = bishop

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